

An Appeal for a Good Conscience

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Please explain 1 Peter 3:21's statement about baptism not being a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a good conscience. "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:21)

Some say this verse teaches a person has a good conscience BEFORE baptism, thus indicating that salvation precedes baptism. This is not what the passage is saying, for several reasons.

A good conscience, while in most cases a good thing, is not necessarily in itself proof that one is saved and in a right relationship with God. Saul of Tarsus said he lived in good conscience all his life (Acts 23:1), which would include the time when he persecuted the church.



How are baptism and conscience related?

Therefore, even if it could be proved from this verse that a good conscience comes before baptism (which it can't), even so that would not necessarily prove that baptism is not necessary for salvation.

Another point to bring out about a good conscience is that the term could be describing a heart that is sincere, a person who is earnestly seeking to obey God. A person earnestly and sincerely seeking to obey God, after reading in the Bible the commands to be baptized, would obey the command to be baptized rather than question it as so many do.

Above all else, remember this. The verse starts out by saying something that a 10 year old could understand. Baptism now saves you. That's very clear. So when we try to figure out the rest of the verse, any conclusion we come to is wrong if it contradicts that very plain statement: Baptism now saves you.

Baptism now saves you. How? It's not the water. Not as a removal of dirt from the body. The water might cleanse the dirt from your body, but the water won't cleanse your soul from sin.

Only the blood of Christ does that. Jesus said that his blood was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28). Paul said that we have redemption and forgiveness of sins through his blood (Eph. 1:7). Is it any

wonder that Ananias said to Saul that he would be washing away his sins if he was baptized? (Acts 22:16) In baptism one spiritually comes into contact with the blood of Christ that cleanses us from our sins. We are commanded to be baptized in water (Acts 10:48; John 3:5), but the water itself doesn't spiritually cleanse us.

So how does baptism save us? We've already examined its connection to the blood of Christ. This verse gives us another way baptism saves us. Peter says that baptism is an appeal. Appeal in the Greek literally means a request, a craving. Baptism is an appeal, a request, a craving...for what?

A good conscience, a clear conscience, the kind of conscience you get when your sins are forgiven.

Baptism is an appeal, a request, a craving for forgiveness and the clear conscience forgiveness brings. The Bible teaches that God will always and immediately grant that forgiveness we crave to any penitent believer the moment he is baptized (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16)

Therefore, that good conscience that tells you that you are now saved and you are now forgiven comes only after baptism, because baptism is how we appeal to God for that forgiveness which brings about that good conscience?

Are you ready to appeal to God for a good conscience?

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