

Man's Response To the Gospel

by Heath Rogers

We know that God wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4), and that He has chosen to save mankind through the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:21). However, one disagreement in our ongoing discussion of infant baptism is whether or not man is an active participant in his salvation.

In a defense of infant baptism that recently appeared in this newspaper, we were told that man is, in essence, a helpless onlooker when it comes to securing his salvation. "Our conversion to faith and entrance into the Kingdom is entirely God's Work. We contribute NOTHING." This conclusion was made to accommodate an unscriptural idea. The Bible clearly teaches that repentance and a confession of faith are prerequisites to baptism, not just associated with baptism. In order to authorize the practice of infant baptism, one must conclude that faith and repentance are given to an infant at the time of his baptism. Since infants obviously have no choice when it comes to such matters, consistency requires one to claim that adults, likewise, contribute nothing to their salvation. This is a forced conclusion that the Bible simply does not support.

We were told that faith should be understood as trust, not as a conscious decision or commitment made by an individual. Since infants are capable of trusting their caregivers, it is argued that they are Scriptural candidates for baptism. However, it should be noted that the gospel requires men to believe and confess specific truths, not just render a generic trust. Jesus said, "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Jesus was rather specific about what one must believe, wasn't He? Philip would not baptize the Ethiopian eunuch until he heard the eunuch confess his belief that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 8:36-37), not just utter a generic statement of trust. Infants may be capable of trusting their caregivers, but common sense tells us that they are not capable of believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

Mark 16:16 clearly states, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." In this passage, Jesus has joined belief and baptism, saying that it results in salvation. We insist that baptism is for believers. An objection was made which pointed out the fact that Jesus did not say "He who believes FIRST and THEN is baptized." Jesus did not have to say such. In this verse, "believes" is the antecedent to "baptized." No one is going to be scripturally or adequately baptized until he believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Let us consider the subject of repentance. The Bible teaches that baptism is for those who repent of their sins. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38). To repent means to turn, but who does the turning? Does man turn away from sin toward God, or does God turn man away from sin? The Jews were asking what they must do. They were told to repent (not to wait to be "repented") and be baptized.

The fact that repentance is a command of God (Acts 17:30) is adequate proof that repentance is something that man does. The individual advocating infant baptism certainly disagrees with us on this point. He wrote, "When God commands us to 'Repent,' that command alone does not mean we have the ability to do it on our own." Take a moment and consider what this statement does to God. What kind of a God will command man to do something, promising to punish him if he doesn't comply, knowing perfectly well that he is incapable of obedience? Does this sound like the God that you read about in your Bible? Such defamation of the character of God is unthinkable, yet it is necessary in order to continue the unscriptural practice of infant baptism.

You see, in order to claim that infants are candidates for baptism, one must redefine the prerequisites of baptism (belief, repentance, and a confession of faith) as works done by God to man, not done by man as a response to the gospel. Such an idea denies the plain teaching of the Bible.

<http://www.ykc.com/cofc/>