



Does Mark 16:16 Teach That Baptism Is Necessary For Salvation

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Does Mark 16:16 teach that baptism is necessary for salvation? Those who believe baptism is essential for an individual to be saved often use this passage to demonstrate this truth. However, those who do not believe baptism is essential for salvation raise objections concerning the passage. Yet, certainly the Bible does not accomplish both of these things in the same verse. So, which is true? Let's investigate.

Examining The Text

The 16th chapter of Mark's record concerning the life of Jesus Christ begins with the resurrection of Christ. Then, Mark demonstrates how He appeared to Mary Magdalene, two disciples, and to the eleven remaining apostles. Then, Mark records Jesus' "Great Commission" to His apostles. And, at the conclusion of this "Great Commission," Jesus ascends into Heaven.

The portion of Mark 16:16 we are focused on during this study appears in the section of Scripture when Jesus commissions His eleven remaining apostles to go and preach the gospel throughout the world. Consider, then, Mark's account of the "Great Commission" (in Mark 16:15-18): "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.'"

In order to examine this text in relation to its teaching on baptism, we must first examine it generally to understand the overall context. First, recognize that Jesus was preparing to leave this earth. He was not going to be with His apostles and disciples any longer (at least, not in human form). He was not going to be teaching people on earth directly. He had fulfilled the mission He had been sent to accomplish. Therefore, Jesus left His apostles with the responsibility of taking the saving message of the gospel throughout this world. And, Jesus informed them (as we will further investigate in just a

moment) that the one who believes and is baptized will be saved; whereas the one who fails to believe will be condemned.

Then, Mark records Jesus as identifying the miraculous spiritual gifts that would accompany those who believed. Though it is outside the scope of this study to fully discuss this matter, the New Testament records that many Christians during New Testament times would possess miraculous gifts that were given by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles' hands (see Acts 8:17-19). The purpose of these gifts is made clear by Mark 16:20. "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen." Thus, these miraculous gifts confirmed the word of God during a time when the New Testament Scriptures were being written and compiled. Yet, these gifts were only designed to be temporary (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

The Bible also records some parallel accounts of the Great Commission. Particularly, the words of Jesus recorded by Matthew very closely resemble the words recorded by Mark. Then, you can also read some final instructions Jesus gave to His apostles before He ascended into Heaven in Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:7-8. But, again, for the purpose of this study, I want to specifically consider what Matthew 28:18-20 says, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."

Did Jesus Require Baptism For Salvation?

As you consider Mark 16:16 in this specific context, you should understand that Jesus gave instructions that answer two questions. First, the question of, "Who will be saved?" Then, the question of, "Who will be condemned?" Let's address how Jesus answers this first question now.

Jesus, in sending His apostles to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, does inform us who will be saved. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Focus your attention on the phrase "will be saved" for just a moment. Anytime Jesus says that a certain individual "will be saved" we had better pay attention! Jesus identified two things in this verse that are necessary to achieving this outcome.

First, Jesus identifies belief. Jesus often spoke about the essential nature of belief for salvation. For instance, in John 8:24, He 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." It would be impossible to be saved from your sins without believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Failing to believe would result in spiritually dying in your sins (as Jesus mentions in the second part of Mark 16:16).

Second, Jesus identifies baptism. Notice Matthew's account of the "Great Commission" also included a reference to baptism as being necessary for salvation. In this account, Jesus told His apostles to go and "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Matthew 28:19). How could they make a sinner into a disciple of Christ? Jesus said that this transformation involved baptism. In the same way, Mark records Jesus as saying

that baptism is a requirement for salvation. You could also note that Jesus spoke of being born of both the water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God in John 3:3-6.

Now, notice the word “and” in Mark 16:16. The word “and” is a coordinating conjunction in the English language that couples two things together. Therefore, whenever Jesus says, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved,” both belief and baptism are required in order to bring about the same result. Yet, there are many who teach that belief is the only requirement God has given to mankind for salvation (though they often say that those who have been saved should be baptized later). However, consider if this is an appropriate use of the English language.

What if I was a very wealthy man and issued the following decree: “He who gives me a blue pen and a bottle of water will receive \$1 million”? What would you have to do in order to receive the \$1 million? Would giving me a blue pen be enough? Would only giving me a bottle of water be enough? Would giving me a red pen and a bottle of water be sufficient? Absolutely not! You would understand that you would be required to give me a blue pen and a bottle of water. The same principle is true about Jesus’ instruction in Mark 16:16. If you want to be saved, you must believe *and* be baptized.

Why Is Baptism Not Mentioned In The Second Part Of The Verse?

Jesus does not only answer the question, “Who will be saved?” in this verse. But, He also answers the question, “Who will be condemned?” After stating that the one who believes and is baptized will be saved, Jesus says “but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Yet, this part of the verse is often used to claim that baptism is not required for salvation. If it was, some will say, the second part of this verse would read, “but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.” But, is this objection sustainable? Let’s consider.

First, the second part of this verse does not erase what Jesus has already said in the first part of the verse. Jesus does not contradict Himself in this verse. He does not say that baptism is necessary for salvation and then say that baptism is not necessary for salvation. Instead, everything that we have already discussed is still true. It is still the one who believes *and* is baptized who will be saved. So, if you want to be saved, you must comply with these two requirements Jesus places upon salvation.

Second, it was not necessary to mention baptism in the second part of the verse. Remember that Jesus is making a different point in the second part of the verse than He was making in the first part. Jesus is now identifying to His apostles who will suffer eternal condemnation in Hell fire. He says that it is the one who does not believe. Certainly, those who would truly believe the preaching of the gospel of Christ would be baptized. However, those who would not have true belief in Jesus as the Christ when the gospel was preached to them would not be baptized.

Therefore, it would be unnecessarily redundant to say, “he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.” Think about a parallel expression for a moment. “He who eats and digests food will live, but he who does not eat will die.” This statement expresses an absolute truth. If an individual desires to live he/she must eat food and digest that food. Both are necessary. However, if an individual chooses to die, he/she must only stop eating. It would be unnecessary to say, “but he

who does not eat and does not digest will die.” It is inferred that if an individual does not eat, he/she will not digest either. So it is with belief and baptism. If an individual does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God through the teaching of the gospel, he/she will not be baptized either – and he/she will experience eternal condemnation. Still, this does *not* change the fact that the one who believes **and** is baptized will be saved!

Is Mark 16:9-20 Genuine?

There are still others who would object to the conclusion that baptism is essential to salvation, based on Mark 16:16, because they reject Mark 16:9-20 as being an authentic passage of the Bible. The authenticity of this passage has been called into question primarily due to the fact that it is *not* included in two of the earliest sets of Greek manuscripts.

However, it is worth pointing out that this is far from the only passage that is missing from these manuscripts. Acts 8:37 and John 7:53-8:11 are two other examples. In fact, there are many variations in the Greek manuscripts. However, in all of these variants, there are no doctrinal discrepancies or errors that would make the Bible unreliable or its doctrines uncertain. Instead, they are all only small and insignificant variations – and the unity in all the manuscripts is an overwhelming point of evidence that the Bible is not a book made by mere men.

Still, it should be pointed out that Mark 16:9-20 is contained in many Greek manuscripts – and the debate as to which set of Greek manuscripts is more accurate is not one that is easily settled. Consider, then, the fact that even Bible translations that question the authenticity of this passage still include the passage in their pages. And, consider that *even if* it is not authentic, Jesus still indicated that baptism was necessary for salvation in Matthew 28:18-20 and John 3:3-6. And, there are many passages in the New Testament that indicate the same (see, for instance, Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21; etc.).

Conclusion

Mark 16:16 teaches that baptism is necessary for salvation! Who will be saved? Jesus says that it is he who believes and is baptized. Who will be condemned? Jesus says it is he who does not believe. Have you obeyed Jesus’ instruction so that you will be saved?

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Written by Eric Krieg

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