

Baptism: When Is One Saved?

(by Bob Pulliam)

I turned the channel over to the religious broadcasting network and listened to it for a few minutes. I began listening in the middle of a sermon on baptism. The man was talking about the Ethiopian eunuch. Here is roughly what he said:

"After the eunuch was saved he wanted to be baptized. I doubt that he knew anything about being born again. I doubt that he knew anything about being in Christ. I doubt that he knew anything about the church. ..."

Well, I have my doubts too; but they aren't about what the Bible says. Let's look at the Bible and see what it says about this matter of being saved *and then* wanting to be baptized.

The appropriate place to start, in this case, would be in Acts 8. After reading from Isa 53:7 & 8 (a prophecy about the crucifixion of Jesus), Philip asked the eunuch if he understood it. The eunuch asked Philip of whom the prophecy was spoken, and then Luke records these statements:

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:35 - 39)

The TV preacher told us that he had doubts about what the eunuch knew. The text, however, tells us that Philip "preached Jesus to him", a point thoroughly overlooked by our TV preacher. The very next statement says that "as they went down the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'" Nothing in the text would lead us to believe that this man was saved before baptism! His confession (v37) doesn't even imply such. What did the eunuch know? He knew enough to be baptized, and he knew what he knew because Philip preached it to him!

It is interesting to note that we do not find the eunuch rejoicing until after he was baptized. The reason can easily be found elsewhere in the scriptures. The time of rejoicing in salvation is obviously when we have been saved. But at what point does that come? It is expressed various ways in the Scriptures. Let's note a few of these expressions and the time that rejoicing would be correct:

Rejoicing When "In Christ"...

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph 1:7). "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Cor 5:17). Salvation is "*in Christ*". Obviously rejoicing will come immediately after one gets *into Christ*. If we find out how one gets *Into Christ* we will know more about the case of the eunuch.

Paul told the Galatians how they got into Christ. He wrote, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal 3:26 & 27) How did they get "into Christ"? They were baptized into Christ! This explains why the eunuch rejoiced after baptism, and not before.

Rejoicing When In Newness Of Life...

The receiving of new life would be a great time for rejoicing. But when does it come? Paul wrote, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom 6:3 & 4) Baptism is the "new birth" from which one rises to "walk in newness of life". This is the "new creature" we previously noted; but remember that only those *"in Christ"* are new creatures. Gal 3:26 & 27 told us that baptism puts us *in Christ*; and this passage now tells us that we rise from baptism to "walk in newness of life"! This passage also repeats the fact that we are "baptized into Christ Jesus". Rejoicing would then be appropriate after baptism, not before.

Rejoicing After Sins Are Washed Away...

Sin separates man from God (Isa 59:2); and brings forth death (Jms 1:15). It is not appropriate to rejoice before one's sins have been washed away, for at that time one is still condemned.

Many people believe that Saul (the apostle Paul) was saved on the road to Damascus when He saw the Lord. This is an assumption (like the eunuch's salvation). Notice that when Ananias told Saul what he should do (Acts 22:10), he said, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16) Baptism washes away sins by the power of Jesus' blood (Rom 5:9). That's why Paul said we "were baptized into His death" (Rom 6:3). Peter associated baptism with the remission (forgiveness) of sins (Acts 2:38). And this would explain why he later wrote "...the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. The like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save you..." (I Pt 3:20 & 21).

Rejoicing When In Christ's Church...

Paul told the Ephesian elders, "...shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28) The church is comprised of God's people (Acts 2:47). When an individual is redeemed by Jesus' blood, he is added to the church (see also Eph 5:23 - 27), which is Christ's body (Eph 1:22 & 23; Col 1:18 & 24). Paul told the Corinthians that they gained entry into the body (church) by means of baptism (I Cor 12:13), "For by (*not 'in', bp*) one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." These, then, were baptized into the church which Christ had purchased with his own blood; and in which salvation is found!

Conclusion...

When was the eunuch saved? Was it before or after baptism? If he was saved before he was baptized, then he was saved before:

- He was in Christ.
- He was in newness of life.

- His sins were washed away.
- He was in Christ's church.

The Bible tells us that salvation is found in all of these, and all of these are attained through baptism. Salvation, then, must be attained through obedience to God's command to be baptized. That's why Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk 16:16). Now, who do you believe?... The TV evangelist, or Jesus? (note Mt 15:1 - 9)