

What Those "Steps" Mean

It was less than 150 years ago that Walter Scott devised a simple way to impress his hearers with the relation of obedient faith to blessings in Christ. He taught children to count on their fingers: Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, and Be baptized. Then, and now, it is obvious that children and adults could learn those "steps" without understanding salvation in Jesus Christ. How sad it is that some have made this almost the whole of the gospel of Christ.

Although believing (trusting) in Christ can have meaning only when it follows an intelligent grasp of divine testimony (Romans 10:17), it is far more than an acceptance of historic facts. The learning must have become a part of us, so that we make decisions upon its base. We not only "*believe that He is*" but also that "*He is a rewarder of them those that diligently seek Him*" (Hebrews 11:6).

The heart purified by faith (Acts 15:9) is the center of one's thoughts, emotions, and will, cleansed from its previous self-centeredness and now given unreservedly to Christ. We act, seeing the unseen. Our sinful conditions before God and the certainty of judgment are so real to us that we recoil from them. We are so convinced that Christ is the sole and gracious solution for our condition that our heart leaps with joy as we reach out for Him.

In the process of arriving at such a faith we realize that our former ways were our downfall, separating us from God. We are humbled in shame, overwhelmed by sorrow (Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 2:7) and turn about, changing the direction of our life. This is repentance (Matthew 21:28-31). It is "toward God" in that it recognizes that our old life was an affront to our Maker, and it involves a genuine determination to "sin no more." Now, and only now, are we ready to be "buried with Him" no more to live as before.

That burial of the former life with the subsequent rising to walk in a new life is the spiritual significance of baptism (Romans 6:3-18). Beautifully recalling the death, burial, and resurrection of Him who became a curse for us, immersion in water has been commanded by our Lord (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Those who would come to Him submit to this figure; in fact, its importance is so great that the believer cannot have a good conscience without baptism if they have been properly instructed in His will (1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism is not a "church ordinance" nor a "sacrament" that, per se, dispenses grace. It is only for believers (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36-37), so that the burial of an infant in baptism -- and certainly the bogus act of sprinkling

a few drops upon its head -- can have no religious significance whatsoever. Submission to baptism is the conscious act of a penitent believer, and it marks the point at which such believers are promised forgiveness and blessing.

The faith that saves does not stop here -- in fact, it is only the beginning of a life of service in the Lord's vineyard, which must be characterized by obedience and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41-47; 2 Peter 3:18). Gentle reader, can you be serious about heaven and ignore God's word (John 12:48)?

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