

# THE PLACE AND PURPOSE OF BAPTISM (1)

BY KEITH GREER

It's always amazed me when honest Bible students who examine the teaching in God's word cannot see that baptism is a vital part of God's Scheme of Redemption. Every subject the Bible discusses is there for a purpose, and it very plainly addresses the subject of baptism. Why is the religious world so confused about this one subject? Could it be that many misunderstand the real purpose of baptism? Let's open-mindedly investigate what the Scriptures teach about baptism. We approach the subject from two perspectives: (1) **What baptism can do.** (2) **What baptism cannot do.** We begin with **What Baptism Cannot Do:**

**Change one's heart.** *"And made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."* {Acts 15:9} The Bible does not teach baptismal regeneration. Baptism does not change a sinner's heart. This is accomplished by the faith that inspires him to place his trust in the Lord. Faith happens when a person hears and believes God's word {Romans 10:17}. Baptism does only what it was designed to do—nothing more or less. When a sinner places his full trust in God's word, faith works on the sinner's heart, changes it, and causes him to obey God's commands. *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart."* {1 Peter 1:22}

**Change one's life.** *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went."* {Matthew 21:28,29} Baptism was not designed to change lives! Only true Bible repentance can achieve that. Repentance is a change of heart, and that results in changed conduct. John told his audience to bring forth *"fruits worthy of repentance,"* {Matthew 3:8}. The fruits a person bears testify that repentance has been wrought in his life.

**Remove temptation.** *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."* {James 1:14} Baptism does not remove temptation from a person's life. Temptation continues to come as it did before he obeyed the gospel by being baptized. In fact, the devil may even work harder to deceive and mislead new Christians. Satan is a terrible loser; he'll continue to seek for ways to get the converted

soul back into his camp. But remember, God promised to help believers overcome temptation {*1 Corinthians 10:13*}. And even if a convert does fall, his Lord has provided an Advocate (Christ) who will make a way for his return to full fellowship {*1 John 2:1,2*}.

**Guarantee eternal life.** *“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”* {*Galatians 5:4*} As previously stated, after a person obeys and is baptized, he can return to the bondage of sin. We are all free moral agents who can choose to return to the path of sin. Peter warned of this danger, *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.”* {*2 Peter 2:20*} Sadly, we sometimes cause others to think we believe baptism does guarantee eternal life. Often, following a death, I have heard brethren ask, **“Had he been baptized?”** The correct question would be, **“Did he remain faithful to the Lord.”** Baptism does not provide an iron-clad guarantee of a heavenly home. God’s word does not promise this concerning baptism. He requires that we be faithful and obey until the end {*1 Corinthians 15:58*}.

Now that we have examined some of the things baptism **CANNOT DO**, let us turn our attention to the what it **CAN DO....** \*\*\*