

## FALSE INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 PETER 3:21

Text: 1 Peter 3:18-21

INTRO: One of the most devastating Scriptures to the false doctrine of salvation by faith only is 1 Peter 3:21. Because of how thoroughly this passage refutes that doctrine, proponents of faith only have manufactured no less than 3 false “explanations” of 1 Pet. 3:21.

These false views are wedded to the particular wording in the King James translation: “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

I. THAT BAPTISM IS “ONLY A FIGURE.” I have heard the expression many times that “baptism is only a figure of what saves us.” Paraphrased even more, it is “an outward sign of an inward grace.”

A. It is true that baptism pictures something. But that is not what this passage is talking about.

1. NT baptism does picture the death, burial & resurrection of Christ.
2. It also pictures our own death to sin, burial, and our “resurrection” to walk in newness of life, Rom. 6:3-5.

B. But in Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 3:21, baptism is NOT the picture, but the thing that was previously pictured. The flood in the days of Noah, by which 8 lives were saved by the use of water PICTURED New Testament baptism, which also now saves us.

1. Peter uses the term “antitype” to describe baptism. The flood was the “type” (picture, figure).
2. Baptism is the antitype (fulfillment).

NOTE: The NIV has done a good job of expressing what Peter was saying in this section of the verse. After referring to the flood in the days of Noah, it reads, “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.”

II. THE SECOND FALSE NOTION ABOUT 1 PETER 3:21 IS THAT “FILTH” MEANS “SIN.” The part in parentheses is often used to eliminate what the apostle had already said. “He is explaining that baptism does not put away sin, it is just a response we make to the fact that our sin has already been put away.”

A. But note that Saul’s sins had not been put away before he was baptized. Acts 22:16.

B. And Paul shows that baptism puts us into the benefits of Christ’s death -- where His blood was shed.  
READ ROMANS 6:3-5.

C. The word translated “filth” simply means DIRT. Baptism is not a bath to wash dirt from the body. It is an act of obedience thru which we appeal to God for the forgiveness of our sins. Compare Naaman, 2 Kings 5.

NOTE: Again, the NIV does a commendable job on this part of the verse: “This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also -- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God...”

III. THE THIRD FALSE INTERPRETATION OF 1 PETER 3:21 CENTERS AROUND THE WORD “ANSWER” IN THE KJV (AND NKJ), AND TIES THAT IN WITH THE SO-CALLED “SINNER’S PRAYER.” “It shows that God has answered our prayer and saved us.”

A. Vine says this of the word translated “answer.” “It was used by the Greeks in a legal sense, as a demand or appeal. Baptism is therefore the ground of an appeal by a good conscience against wrong doing.”

- B. Thayer agrees and suggests a comparison of Acts 24:16, “I strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” Thus obedience to the command of baptism is an appeal, a seeking, a striving for a good conscience toward God.
- C. This again corresponds with the expression used by both Peter & Paul of baptism’s part in “calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 2:21, 37-38; 22:16.

READ ROMANS 10:13-16

NOTE: The NASB reads, “Baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience...”

CONCLUSION: Just as God used water to lift Noah & his family above the sin & degradation of his society, God uses NT baptism to connect us with the cleansing blood of Jesus. He has commanded it, and we must submit to it. It serves both to call upon Him, to appeal to Him for salvation, and as a pledge that we seek to acquire and maintain a clear conscience toward Him. “And now why are you waiting? Arise & be baptized, & wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16).

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, March 25, 2001  
Oaks-West, Burnet, TX, April 8, 2001  
Highway 29, Liberty Hill, TX, April 8, 2001  
South Loop, Crockett, TX, May 9, 2002 (meeting)  
Rice Rd., Tyler, TX, October 9, 2002 (meeting)