

A Curious Spectacle

On August 12th and 13th of this year, a church in Texas baptized 583 people. At first glance, one is tempted to say, “Wow!” But, as the event is examined more closely, one just says, “Why?” You see, the church *organized* the event. They even had a “director of baptism” who put it all together. The weekend was to be an imitation of Pentecost (Acts 2). It was reported as a spontaneous baptism, but the reality was that the preacher challenged people whom he described as already being “Christ-followers” to be baptized. He wanted them to “go public with their faith,” but he considered them as Christians already. He explained how baptism is one of the “fundamental steps” in the life of a Christ follower, and expressed regret that many of them had not been baptized. Note his words: “It’s funny how many people will become a Christian and then balk when it comes to being baptized.” (facts and quotes gathered from a story in *PreachingNow*, August 28, 2006).

I have a thought: Could it be that people who have been taught that baptism is not necessary have actually come to believe that baptism is *not* necessary? How can a preacher, who preaches that baptism is not essential for salvation, be surprised that people don’t want to be baptized?

I know the answer to my own questions—Many religious people reject baptism as part of the salvation process because they consider baptism for the remission of sins as a “work” of the type described in Ephesians 2:8,9—in which salvation would come forth from the “work” itself. However, if someone is required to do *anything* at all (repent, confess, pray the “sinner’s prayer, etc.”) in order to be saved, those actions must, in all fairness, be described as works.

The fact is that baptism, as practiced in the New Testament was a *conditional* work (included in the believing process), not a *meritorious* one (in which the act itself brings about salvation). It is difficult to see baptism as an option with verses like: “...*Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3,5); “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved . . .*” (Mark 16:16); “*Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. . .*” (Acts 2:38); “*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . .*” (Romans 6:3); “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” (Galatians 3:27)—all Bible quotes from ESV

—Lance Cordle