Believe and Be Baptized for Salvation? (Mark 16:16)

This is probably the single most common argument after Acts 2:38 for those who believe in baptismal regeneration. They appear to believe that these two, Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16 close the book on the whole argument, but do they? Acts 2:38 is dealt with in a separate document, but in this article let's take a few minutes to examine the arguments for and against using Mark 16:16 as support for the belief in baptismal regeneration. Mark 16:16 says:

> *Mark 16:16*
> *16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*
> *NKJV*

The argument is this. If you take the first half of the verse, it says "He who believes and is baptized is saved", therefore believing and baptism are the essential requirements for baptism. For the believers in this doctrine, that is a slam-dunk argument.

But is it? Let's look at this passage in context and let's see if it really says what they claim.

First, it inappropriate to take a verse out of context, let alone cutting a verse in half and only looking at the first half of the verse. I could come up with a lot of very strange doctrines using that approach. Let me give an example:

> *Gen 2:16-17*
> *16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*
> *NKJV*

God says in this passage:

> "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*

If I did the same thing to this passage as is done in this argument in Mark 16:16 shown above, I would stop at the semi-colon and would read:

> "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat*"

Of course I have now change the meaning of the passage entirely and negated fully the message that God was giving to Adam and Eve. This is therefore a very dangerous approach and can significantly alter the meanings of many passages throughout scripture.

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If we look now at Mark 16:16 in its entirety, we read:

Mark 16:16
16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be
condemned.
NKJV

What do we know just from this verse alone:

1) If we believe and are baptized that we are saved.
2) If we do not believe, we are condemned (unsaved)

The interesting this is that this does NOT say that if we are not baptized that we are condemned. But it does say that is we do not believe that we are condemned. Why would that be omitted in the second half of the verse? This is where we need to examine the passage using logic. I apologize if this seems a bit too technical, but I will try to explain what we are doing and why as we go along. If your eyes start glazing over as you read the logic part of it, don't worry, just go to the next page and you can see the end result. I will be validating the conclusion of the logic calculation by going back into scripture afterwards, so don't be too concerned if you don't understand how these equations work. I have chosen to add this approach by manner in which this verse is typically dealt with defies logic, and I am trying to remove the emotion from the debate over what the verse means. The reason for this is that so many debates end up in arguing the first half of the verse against the second half and the emotions take over.

Let's turn these passages into logic equations, similar to those used by a computer. This approach uses what is called Boolean Algebra is a standard practice to determine whether a statement is true or false. There are many thousands of books written on using this approach, and it is the standard approach used for design computer logic circuitry. Therefore the approach is based upon solid and well established principles.

We will assign the follows values / letters to make the equations easier to understand:

1 = Yes, 0 = No.
A = Believes
B = Baptized
C = Saved

Using this, the first half of the verse can be changed to the following equation:

IF A AND B, THEN C

The second half of the verse is:

IF NOT A, THEN NOT C.

To make both parts end up in a requirement for salvation, we will negate both sides of the second equation, and it becomes:

IF NOT (NOT A), THEN (NOT (NOT C), which reduces to IF A THEN C

The full equation then becomes:

IF (A AND B) OR IF A, THEN C

Okay now we create what is called a truth table and assign all possible values to A and B to see which cause C (Save) to be YES (1). To give an example as to how this is calculated, for the example where A=1 and B=0, we see for A AND B, both must be 1 for the result to be one, and yet in this case B=0, there the result of A AND B is 0. In the second half, A=1, therefore when we calculate the result of (A AND B) OR A, we get 0 OR 1, which results in 1 or YES, because all we need is for one of them to be true to be a positive result. We have calculated the full truth table below:

A	B	C
0	0	0
0	1	0
1	0	1
1	1	1

We end up with two conditions where salvation results, and those are the third and fourth conditions. Let's examine what these conditions are. In the third condition, we have A = 1, therefore it does not matter what B is because the second half of the equation simply depends upon the value of A. When we re-insert the meaning of the letter back to the equation, the simplified equation becomes If a person believes and is not baptized, then they are saved.

In condition 4, both A and B are 1, so both half of the equation are 1, and again we end up with 1 as the result. This equation, with the meanings of the letters, then the meaning of the reduced equation is If a person both believes and is baptized, then they are saved.

The truth of this conclusion just from a logical perspective can be seen by using the same logic syllogism as Mark 16:16 uses, only in a different context:

> If I have a a full time job and red hair, I get a paycheque. If do not have a job, I receive no paycheque.

Note that it is the paycheque which is critical. The red hair is incidental and yet this sentence is still logically valid. One may ask why baptism was even inserted in the first half of the verse if it adds

nothing to the requirements for salvation. I believe that it was to emphasize the importance of witnessing your faith and showing your desire to following Christ by being obedient and showing love for Him who dies on the cross for our salvation.

Some may argue that the third condition ends up with a result which contradicts the first half of the verse, but it doesn't unless you ignore the input from the second half. Let's look at the wider context of scripture now to see if in fact the context supports the logical conclusion arrived at by this equation or if in fact we find a contradiction.

The third condition stated that if a person believes and is not baptized, then they are saved. Is that scriptural?

> *Mark 1:14-15*
> *14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."*
> *NKJV*

What is the gospel that we are to believe? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 what the gospel is that saves us:

> *1 Cor 15:1-5*
> *15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.*
> *NKJV*

It is notable that the gospel does not include baptism but does include believing in the word. Did Paul include baptism as part of the word of the gospel that he gave them?

> *1 Cor 1:17*
> *17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*
> *NKJV*

No. baptism was separate from the gospel. Are there are any other scripture that speak about us being saved by belief in Christ alone? Yes, many, I won't give all of them, but here is a sampling:

Mark 5:35-36
36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe."
NKJV

Luke 8:11-13
11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.
NKJV

John 1:12-13
12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
NKJV

John 3:18-19
18 He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
NKJV

John 3:35-36
36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
NKJV

John 6:29
29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."
NKJV

Acts 16:31
31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."
NKJV

There are many more that go from one end of the New Testament to the other. But not a single one says that you must be baptized to be saved, or that if you are not baptized, you will be condemned. Even after Mark 16:16, we read the following in Mark 16:17:

Mark 16:17-18
17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."
NKJV

It does not say those who believe and are baptized, but just those who believe. So the conclusion from this is that the outcome of the logical analysis of Mark 16:16 is consistent with the local context of Mark 16:16, as well as the wider context of the whole of scripture when it says that we need to believe in Christ to be saved, but that baptism is not essential for salvation.

Tom Smith
December 26, 2006
http://discern.ca
smithtj.geo@yahoo.com

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