

## Baptism: What Is It For?

To say that salvation is all up to God and we don't have a part is an unscriptural teaching. Salvation involves the mind, heart, *and* body. God *could* have made the waters at Morah drinkable by "doing a miracle," but He made Moses also throw a piece of wood into the pond (Exo 15:23-25). God *could* have saved Hezekiah's life by "doing a miracle," but a poultice still was applied to save him (2 Kgs 20:7). He also *could* have saved us with a "magic wand," but He chose to have us physically do our part to complete the process. While most preachers outright disagree with this, the Bible teaches otherwise. So not only will I prove the necessity of baptism, but I'll expose the reasons why most churches deny its role in a person's salvation.

Here is a chart that shows the four "steps," if you will, of the conversion process—faith, confession, repentance, and baptism:

Conversions Listed in the Book of Acts	Believe	Confess	Repent	Baptize
Day of Pentecost (2:38)			X	X
Samaritans (8:12)	X			X
Simon the Sorcerer (8:13)	X			X
Ethiopian Eunuch (8:36-39)	X			X
Saul / Paul (9:18 / 22:16)				X
Cornelius & Household (10:47-48)				X
Lydia & Household (16:15)				X
Philippian Jailor & Household (16:33)				X
Corinthians (18:8)	X			X
Ephesian Disciples (19:5)				X

Is it a coincidence that in all the conversions mentioned in Acts, that baptism is explicitly mentioned? Preachers yell, "all you need is faith!" Yet faith is only mentioned four times. Is God trying to tell us something?

Here are some arguments used by the "faith-only" crowd:

### **Baptism is a work, and Paul says salvation comes by "faith only."**

A verse used to support this claim:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. (Rom 4:4-6)

They take the phrase, “does not work” to mean, “doesn’t get baptized,” since they claim baptism is a work. Thus, anywhere you see ‘work,’ ‘works,’ etc., you’re supposed to believe that this includes baptism. However, this is not what Paul had in mind. Otherwise, he would have shunned baptism altogether. Verses 9 and following show that Paul is referring to the “work” of circumcision, not baptism. The Jews believed that simply by being circumcised, they were justified before God. It was Abraham’s trust (faith) that God credited to him as righteousness. It was Abraham’s unwavering faith that caused him to obey God. It also follows that simply being baptized gets you nowhere—it has to come from the heart.

Baptism is not a human work; it’s an occasion.

## **We’re saved by grace, not by works.**

The verse used:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-9)

Grace is God’s undeserved favor offered to you and me through the cross. It is, as the scripture says, a gift—something freely given and that cannot be earned by any works of self. Again, preachers jump on “works,” claiming that baptism saves no one. But that’s not to what Paul was referring.

Some Jews converting to Christianity had infiltrated the church, telling Christians they had to keep the Mosaic law and ceremonial rites *in addition* to being saved by Christ’s blood. The context of Paul’s writing correctly identifies these “works” as works of the law—keeping the Sabbath, observing festivals, etc. Baptism is never defined as a work of the Law.

## **Baptism is the “picture” of death and burial to sin and resurrection to new life. It’s an “outward sign of an inward cleansing.”**

Paul says that baptism is a burial into Christ’s death, not a “picture.” Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been *baptized into His death*? Therefore we have been *buried with Him through baptism into death*. (Rom 6:3-4)

Neither does the NT teach that baptism is a “burial to sin.” Rather, “We have died with Christ.” (Rom 6:8) Christ died to sin (vs. 10), and in that sense, Christians die to sin (vs. 11).

As far as the “outward sign of an inward cleansing,” no such thing is taught in the bible. Therefore, it should be discarded as human-made and patently bogus.

## **Baptism is a picture of what has already taken place in the heart.**

What does occur in the heart? One is *faith* (Rom 10:10); the other is *repentance* (2 Cor 7:9, 10). Repentance is proved by deeds; baptism is one of the first deeds an obedient disciple gets done. There is no scripture that says baptism represents “what has already taken place in the heart.” It’s a beautiful phrase that has no scripture to support it.

## **Baptism is a privilege and duty, not a necessity.**

Where’s the verse that says this? There’s nowhere in the Bible that even implies baptism is a “privilege.” It is a duty, in that God commands it. We’ll come to that in a moment.

## **All a person needs to do to be saved is say the Sinner’s Prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart.**

The sinner’s prayer has many variations, but they all say the same thing: *I admit and confess that I’m a sinner and need the blood of Christ to save me.* Other variations are more prosaic, but this is its essence.

It’s true that anyone coming to the cross must do so out of sincerity. The Jews at Pentecost “were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37) In other words, they had been convicted as being guilty. They were “cut to the heart.” Did Peter tell them, “Say the Sinner’s Prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart.”? No! He told them, “Repent—change your ways—and be baptized.” (vs. 38)

There is no scripture telling anyone to ask Jesus to come into your heart or your life. Revelation 3:20 is used to support this idea, which says, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” However, this is not an instruction on how to be saved, but a statement made to Christians, not sinners, to maintain fellowship with Christ.

## **It’s the blood of Christ that saves you, not baptism!**

To which I say, “Amen!” Baptism, in and of itself, does not save anyone. It is Christ’s blood atonement that removes the guilt and penalty of sin. It is His blood that satisfied the Law’s requirements. “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.” (Heb 9:22) But at what point in the salvation process is the blood of Christ applied to the sinner to take away those sins? Two verses give us an answer:

1. Jesus said, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*” (Matt 26:28)

2. “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins.*” (Acts 2:38)

Christ shed His blood, but *it is at baptism where the remission of sins is applied and not before.* Someone will argue that Acts 10:43 says, “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” In other words, all you need is faith to receive remission of sins. But this doesn’t nullify baptism. If so, you can use this same verse to get rid of confession and repentance.

## **I’m still not convinced—baptism doesn’t save you.**

Two verses contradict this belief. The first one regards the Flood, where Peter writes, “...baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.” (1 Peter 3:21)

The Jews treated baptism as a purification ritual, which Peter denies. It is an appeal to God for a good conscience. Simply stated, the sinner wishes to be free of the burden of guilt. “Give me a clean conscience, Lord!” You’re appealing to God for a good conscience. So when you’re baptized, your old “sin nature” is buried—put to death—and you’re raised up in a representation of Christ’s resurrection. (Romans 6) When the sinful old self is buried, the sins connected to you are buried and forgiven. A person coming up out of the water then has a clean slate—a clean conscience before God.

The second verse is in Mark 16, where Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes *and is baptized* will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16)

Having only faith isn’t what gets the job done. You’re not saved when you believe, but when you obey. The demons believe, and it does them not one lick of good. (James 2:19)

## **Mark 16:16 isn’t part of the original manuscript.**

If baptism wasn’t mentioned, you can bet that “scholars” would have remained silent on this passage. They believe Mark 16 to have an appendix, added by an uninspired writer, and most Bibles today have a footnote loudly supporting this claim. Some Bibles omit it altogether. In light of other scriptures, however, Mark 16 doesn’t contradict the teaching. The section has been part of the scriptures since the beginning. Only because of denominational teachings has there been an emphasis on pointing out Mark 16’s (lack of) authority.

It’s both foolish and dangerous to assume that God was not in control when the early church compiled the NT. To claim that the Almighty can create the Universe but was unable to get a book into print is just plain silly. Can you picture someone standing before the Throne and telling God, “Well, Lord, I didn’t get baptized because Mark 16 didn’t belong in the Bible.”?

## **Mark 16:16 doesn't say, "whoever does NOT believe and is NOT baptized will be condemned."**

Arguing semantics is risky business when you're dealing with the Word of God. There are a lot of arrogant men who do so. I consider this a desperate, childish argument.

Someone who doesn't believe the Gospel is not going to be baptized. Why would the Holy Spirit use bad grammar to say so? If someone refuses to buy a plane ticket and also refuses to get on the plane, either action results in the same consequence. To board the plane, a person has to buy a ticket. No ticket means you're not getting aboard. Buying the ticket and *not* boarding the aircraft results in the same consequence. But to fulfill the trip's requirements, *both* actions are necessary.

## **The thief on the cross wasn't baptized and he went into Paradise.**

The thief on the cross was the only person in the Bible who was given this privilege. He was in no position to do anything except rely on God's mercy. Had he been given the opportunity, do you think the thief would have refused baptism? Not likely.

At the time of Jesus' life and death, the Old Testament was still in effect. The kingdom had not come, nor would come until the Day of Pentecost when baptism was instituted in the name of the Lord Jesus.

There are several instances in the Old Testament where God forgave sins (2 Sam 12:13; Psa 32:1; 103:3), long before Christ came to earth. But that was His sovereign prerogative as God. To refuse or balk at baptism simply because you're embarrassed by public humiliation is one thing. But don't point to the thief on the cross as your reason for not getting baptized.

## **The phrase, "repent and baptized for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 doesn't mean that in the Greek language.**

It's amazing the amount of ink and reams of paper that have been used up explaining the word 'for' in this verse. Pickup any commentary to confirm my assertion. The fact is, denominational preachers are trying to wiggle their way out of the plain truth. Thank goodness they weren't around to "advise" the original Greek translators!

If you have to use Greek to support a doctrine, your theory is flawed. Analyzing a scripture's meaning by studying the ancient language serves to reinforce its truth, but it can never be a basis for establishing that truth. Instead of grasping at Greek straws, other scriptures need to be consulted to confirm the truth.

Charismatics (those of the Pentecostal variety) are quick to say that Acts 2:38 refers to Holy Spirit baptism. But can a person be baptized in the Spirit "on demand"? The verse refers to compliance with something that those at Pentecost were *told* to do. You don't *tell* someone to get baptized in the Spirit.

Cornelius' household was baptized in the Holy Spirit, but it not by human will (Acts 10). Ephesians 4: 4 also points out that there is one baptism, not two.

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**What about someone who can't get to water? You're telling me that babies who die un-baptized are going to hell? You're saying that someone on their way to church to get baptized and gets killed in a car accident is going to hell?**

The Bible does not teach infant baptism. Hypothetical circumstances fall into what Paul condemns as "useless arguments" (2 Tim 2:23). God promises that those who seek Him will find Him (Luke 11:9). He is not going to "hand a snake" to someone who is seeking salvation. (Matt 7:10)

There is only one instance that I'm personally aware of when a person died before being baptized. It involved a woman who wanted to be saved but only wanted a particular preacher to baptize her. She fell under the condemnation spoken of in Luke's gospel:

[A certain man] said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:61-62)

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### The Bottom Line

Baptism hinders those "quickie salvations," where you go through a spiritual drive-through window and pick up "Jesus into your heart." Radio and television preachers can't rack up the numbers if they have to wait for baptisms to be performed. God doesn't dispense this precious treasure to those who are too busy or too embarrassed to get to a church. Baptism is what puts you into Christ's death (Rom 6:1ff), yet the false teacher claims that you can just bypass this event. Not necessary, they say.

Paul writes, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ *have clothed yourselves with Christ.*" (Gal 3:26-27) The false teacher says you don't need to cover yourself with Christ; it's not important. Let's just run around naked until we have our annual baptism event at the park. We are supposed to be "conformed to the image of His Son." (Rom 8:29) That "conforming" means putting on Jesus' "clothes" so that we look like Him.

False teachers will have you believe that baptism doesn't have anything to do with your relationship with God. You don't need to clothe yourself with Christ; it doesn't mean anything. You can skip being baptized and go right into God's presence. No baptism. No putting on Christ. Unimportant.

No scripture teaches you can put on Christ in any other way except *through* baptism. If someone tells you differently, ask them for the verse. If someone tells you differently, they are lying. Moses tossed the wood into the water. Hezekiah put the poultice on his wound. God has His part, and you have yours.

[Terry DeLaney](#)