

# Baptism is it really that important?

## Baptism

The gospel of Jesus Christ tells of God's wonderful grace, how in love He gave His Only Begotten Son to die on the cross for sins. How must man respond to benefit from God's saving grace? By faith and repentance? Certainly. But is that all? What about baptism?

Is it necessary for one to be baptized to...

- a. Be saved?
- b. Be forgiven our sins?
- c. Receive the blessings of God's grace offered through Jesus?

This study is devoted to answering these questions by simply letting the Bible speak for itself on the subject of baptism and what bearing, if any, baptism may have on being saved from our sins.



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## PREFACE

Because there are so many people telling us what's right, what's wrong, what's important, what's not important and everyone claiming to base their opinions on scripture, it's important to lay a foundation for the beginning of this study.

As you consider the role of baptism in regard to salvation, do three things:

**1. First, read objectively.**

Don't read to see if what is said measures up to your past tradition. Just make this a time to open God's Word and allow him to speak to you.

**2. Secondly, study thoroughly.**

God gave us the entire scripture so do not take one verse and build an entire theology around that one verse. The Bible instructs us to *"rightly divide the word of truth and to study the whole counsel of God"*. (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 20:27)

People can take one verse of the Bible or one phrase about salvation and close their minds to any other verses that might expand on it. That's why there's so many mixed signals to our world.

**3. Thirdly, begin correctly.**

Pray, pray, pray. Use your scripture, study the passages, expect God to speak to you. Open your mind and be honest with God's Word and what God tells you.

It's our hope and prayer that you will allow God, through His Word, to speak to you about your salvation.

The Staff

## ***What role, if any, does 'baptism' play in our salvation?***

That question and the resulting answer are crucial to a proper understanding of God's Plan of Salvation.

To begin, notice the words of Jesus as He commissioned the apostles to proclaim the gospel to the world ...

### **Baptism in the Great Commission**

In two gospel accounts, Jesus mentions baptism:

1. *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* - Matthew 28: 19
2. *"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

From Jesus himself, we learn that baptism is somehow involved in ...

1. The process of becoming a disciple and;
2. The process of salvation.

Before we draw any final conclusions just on these two statements alone, consider the preaching of the apostles as they carried out the Great Commission.

### **Baptism in the Preaching of the Apostles**

#### **The Preaching of Peter**

In Acts 2:38, Peter commanded people to be baptized *"for the forgiveness of sins"*. Does "for" mean *"in order to"* or *"because of"*?

Note that we find the same grammatical construction in Matthew 26:28; where Jesus said His blood would be shed for many *"for the forgiveness of sins."* Clearly Jesus meant *"in order to"* provide forgiveness of sins, and not *"because"* forgiveness of sins had already occurred.

Note also that in Acts 2:38 baptism is joined by the conjunction *"and"* to the command "repent". Both are commanded *"for the forgiveness of sins."* Just as people were commanded to repent "for" (in order to) the forgiveness of sins, so they were commanded to be baptized "for" (in order to) the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 10:44-48, Peter clearly commanded baptism (in water) -- Peter's preaching is in harmony with the statements of Jesus in the Great Commission.

#### **The Preaching of Philip**

Examine carefully two accounts of Philip's preaching:

1. The Samaritans - Acts 8:5,12 and;
2. The Ethiopian - Acts 8:35-38.

In both cases, Philip "preached Christ." Yet baptism was an immediate result of such preaching. Is there any surprise in light of Jesus' statements in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15-16?

## The Preaching of Paul

### The conversion of Lydia - Acts 16:13-15.

Lydia gave heed to the things spoken by Paul, by being baptized! Notice her comment in Acts 16:15.

How could Paul have judged her to be faithful to the Lord? One clear way was by her response to the command of the Lord concerning baptism!

### The conversion of the Philippian Jailor - Acts 16:29-33.

Telling the jailor first that he must believe on the Lord to be saved, Paul went on to speak concerning the Word of the Lord to him and his family. In response to the word of the Lord, they were immediately baptized!

Evidently the word of the Lord stressed the need to be baptized quickly (in fact, in EVERY detailed example of conversion found in the Book of Acts, people were baptized after only one lesson!)

### Paul's account of his own conversion - Acts 22:10-16.

He was told to go to Damascus to learn what he must do. One of the things he was told was to be baptized without delay - Acts 22:16: *"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."*

**NOTE:** Despite seeing the Lord on the road to Damascus, having spent three days fasting and praying (Acts 9:9-11), he was **STILL IN HIS SINS!** Clearly Paul believed that baptism had some connection with his own salvation!

The connection between baptism and salvation becomes clearer when the examples of apostolic preaching are put side by side and the elements of conversion are compared:

Matt 28: 18-19		<i>Examples of Conversion</i>		Mark 16:15-16	
Preaching	Believed	Repented	Confessed	Baptized	Saved
Pentecost Acts 2:14-41	NI	37-38	NI	38-41	38-47
Samaria Acts 8:5-13	12	NI	NI	12,13	NI
Eunuch Acts 8:35-39	36-37	NI	37	38	39
Saul Acts 9:17-18	NI	NI	NI	18	22:16
Cornelius Acts 10:34-48	43	NI	NI	48	43
Lydia Acts 16:13-15	14	NI	NI	15	15
The Jailor Acts 16:30-34	31	NI	NI	33	34
Preaching + Faith + Repentance + Confession + Baptism = Salvation Romans 10:14 Hebrews 5:8-9 Luke 13:3 Romans 10:9-10 Galatians 3:27 2 Timothy 2:10					

\*NI = necessary inference

In every case of conversion, baptism precedes salvation which is in agreement with what Jesus said in Mark 16:16, *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."* In every case of conversion, baptism is involved in the process of becoming a true disciple of Christ, which agrees with Christ's words in Matthew 28:19, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ..."*

But to be sure that our conclusions are correct, let's consider what the apostles taught in their letters concerning baptism ...

## **Baptism in the Teachings of the Apostles**

### **The Teaching of Paul**

Romans 6:3-8

*"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin-- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."*

We learn that baptism:

1. Is a baptism into the death of Christ
2. Is a burial with Him into death
3. Is done in order that we might live a new life
4. Assures that we shall be united with Christ in His resurrection
5. Involves crucifying the old self, that the body of sin may be destroyed
6. Frees us from sin
7. Assures our living with Him

Note Paul's preface to these remarks: *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus ..."* The blessings he discusses pertains to those who had been baptized!

Galatians 3:26-27

*"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."*

We learn that baptism is involved in the process of becoming sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

The *"for"* beginning verse 27 begins an elaboration as to HOW we become sons of God through faith. We learn the MEANS by which we *"clothe ourselves"* (and so become sons of God). Note again: *"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves."* " ... *Who were ...* " means no more or no less. Those who have been baptized into Christ have received Christ into their lives!

Colossians 2:11-13

*"In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,"*

Paul taught that baptism is:

1. A "spiritual circumcision" in which sins are "cut away."
2. A burial with Christ, and also a resurrection with Him;
3. Made effective through faith in the working of God.
4. Where God makes us *"alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ... "*

If, by the working of God, baptism into Christ accomplishes all these things, can we say it is not necessary?

## The Teaching of Peter

1 Peter 3:18-21

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and 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. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "*

Peter makes a comparison between Noah's salvation and our own.

**Noah was saved by:**

1. Grace (Genesis 6:8)
2. Faith (Hebrews 11:7)
3. Water (1 Peter 3:18-21)

**Likewise we are saved by:**

1. Grace
2. Faith
3. Water

Not that there is any cleansing power in the water! For only the blood of Jesus can redeem us from sin - Ephesians 1 :7. But God has chosen to use the act of baptism as the point in time in which He applies the blood of Jesus to our souls!

Perhaps we can see why Peter would say *"and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also- ... "*. We are saved by the blood of Jesus, yes. But the application of Christ's blood to our souls occurs when we, in trusting faith, are united with Him in baptism!

Is baptism essential to salvation? Let the words of Christ, the preaching and teaching of His apostles provide the answer! All the rationalization that can be done cannot omit the fact that we must respond in the manner which He has asked. It's not man's way but God's way.

But what if we choose not to obey the words of Christ and His apostles?

*"Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."*

- Acts 13:46

Listen to the words given to Paul:

*"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."*

- Acts 22:16

## ***"Jesus wasn't baptized for the remission of sins and we are to follow his example"***

We can agree with much within this statement. For example, we are to follow the example of Christ (1 John 2:6; 1 Corinthians 11: 1). We can also agree that Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of His sins, for indeed He had no sin (Hebrews 4: 15). However, the fact He had no sin itself might show something different between His baptism and ours.

### **Why was Jesus baptized anyway?**

Do those who use this statement against baptism follow it consistently, and submit to baptism for the same reason Jesus did? In John 1:29-34, John the Baptist told why he baptized Jesus:

*"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God. "*

Indeed, the reason John baptized Jesus was not for the remission of His sins, but to enable God to show John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah He promised in the Old Testament! God had told John the Baptist that one day while he baptized people, the Spirit would descend on one of them in the form of a dove. When this happened, John would know he had baptized the Messiah.

Now, who do you know who ought to be baptized for the same reason Jesus was? Who has been baptized for the same reason Jesus was? Today, none of us follows the example of Jesus in being baptized so God can show we are the Messiah!

## ***"The blood of Christ forgives our sins, not baptism"***

Without exception, everyone who reads these words and believes the Bible, accepts that the blood of Christ was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Before we discuss the relation of baptism to the forgiveness of sins, let's ask ourselves why we universally agree Jesus' blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins? Wasn't it because the Lord Himself said in Matthew 26:28:

*"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. "*

Certainly, we can all accept this plain statement from the lips of our Lord Himself.

Why then can we not accept the words of His apostle Peter, when in Acts 2:38, Peter used identically the same language in the Greek about baptism:

*"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. "*

If we can't believe Peter in Acts 2:38 when he said baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, why would we believe Jesus when He used the same words to say His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins? If on the other hand, we believe Jesus when He said His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins, why shouldn't we as well believe Peter when he used the same words to say baptism was for the

forgiveness of sins?

Some suggest that "for" or "unto" means "because of" in Acts 2:38, i.e., we are to be baptized because our sins have already been forgiven. Then being fair with that suggestion, would not identical language mean that Jesus shed His blood because our sins had already been forgiven, and therefore the blood of Christ has nothing to do with the remission of sins? Surely, we can see that whatever purpose Jesus accomplished when He shed His blood, the same purpose is accomplished by the baptism of a repentant believer in the name of Jesus Christ.

It is by no means unusual to meet people who insist the word translated "for" or "unto" means "because of" in Acts 2:38. However, when pressed for a New Testament translation that so translates the word, they universally meet with failure.

Denominational Scholars generally will not sacrifice their scholarship in favor of their denominational doctrine.

G.R. Beasley-Murray, Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, later Senior Professor at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY, wrote a modern classic, **Baptism In The New Testament**. He gives chapters which thoroughly discuss baptism in the Gospels, in Acts, in Paul's writings, and in other apostolic writings. In his introduction, Beasley-Murray said:

*"This book is intended to offer a Baptist contribution to the discussions on baptism that are taking place throughout the Christian world. But the indefinite article should be observed; the impression must not be given that my interpretations are characteristic of Baptist thought generally. At most it can be claimed that they represent a trend gaining momentum among Baptists in Europe. I have striven to interpret the evidence of the New Testament as a Christian scholar, rather than as a member of a particular Christian Confession. "* (G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism In The New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962, pp. v-vi.)

From his chapter on baptism in Acts, Beasley-Murray said:

*Consequently, baptism is regarded in Acts as the occasion and means of receiving the blessings conferred by the Lord of the Kingdom. Admittedly, this way of reading the evidence is not characteristic of our thinking, but the intention of the author is tolerably clear.* (Ibid., p. 102)

*Whatever the relationship between baptism and the gift of the Spirit elsewhere in Acts, there appears to be no doubt as to intention of Acts 2:38; the penitent believer baptized in the name of Jesus Christ may expect to receive at once the Holy Spirit, even as he is assured of the immediate forgiveness of his sins.* (Ibid., p. 108)

From his chapter on baptism in the apostolic writings, concerning Romans 6:3-4, Beasley-Murray said:

*We that are Baptists have largely ignored this aspect of Pauline teaching; even when we have heard it we have hesitated to accept, partly no doubt because of the one-sided emphasis it has often received but partly also because we have not known how to deal with it. But misapplication of truth must never be permitted to make us insensitive to it.* (Ibid., pp. 142-143)

Some concluding statements were:

*In light of the foregoing exposition of the New Testament representations of baptism, the idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out of harmony with the New Testament itself. Admittedly, such a judgment runs counter to the popular tradition of the Denomination to which the writer belongs ...*

*The extent and nature of the grace which the New Testament writers declare to be present in baptism is astonishing for any who come to the study freshly with an open mind .*

*... the "grace" available to man in baptism is said by the New Testament writers to include the following elements: forgiveness of sin, Ac 2:38 and cleansing from sins, Ac 22:16, 2 Co 6:11; union with Christ, Ga 3:27, and particularly union with Him in his death and resurrection, Ro. 6:3ff, Co 2:11ff, with all that implies of release from sin's power, as well as guilt, and the sharing of the risen life of the Redeemer, Ro 6:1-11; participation in Christ's sonship, Ga 3:26ff; consecration to God, 1 Co 6:11, hence membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, 1 Co 12:13, Ga3:27-29; possession of the Spirit, Ac 2:38, 1 Co 6:11, 12:13, and therefore the new life in the Spirit, i.e., regeneration, Ti 3:5, Jn 3:5; grace to live according to the will of God, Ro 6:ff, Co 3:1ff; deliverance from the evil powers that rule this world, Co 1:13; the inheritance of the Kingdom of God, Jn 3:5, and the pledge of the resurrection of the body, Ep 1:3ff, 4:30. (Ibid., pp. 263-264)*

Beasley-Murray stated his conclusion in a chapter entitled "**Baptismal Reform and Church Relationships**":

*First, there ought to be a greater endeavor to make baptism integral to THE GOSPEL. It is taken as axiomatic amongst us [Baptists - SGD] that the proclamation of the Gospel consists of making the redemptive acts of God in Christ known and calling for faith in Christ as the due response; baptism is then a proper subject for exposition in the enquirers' class, along with instruction as to the nature of the Church, of worship, of Christian obligation in the Church and to the world, etc.*

*Peter's response, however, to the cry of his conscience stricken hearers on the Day of Pentecost was not "Repent and believe", but "Repent and BE BAPTIZED"! (Ac 2:38). Naturally faith was presumed in repentance, but Peter's answer told the Jews how to become Christians: faith and repentance are to be expressed in baptism, and SO they are to come to the Lord. Baptism is here a part of the proclamation of Christ. In an Apostolic sermon it comes as its logical conclusion. An effort ought to be made to restore this note in our [Baptist - SGD] preaching. (Ibid., p. 393)*

Thus, we believe the blood of Jesus was shed for the remission of sins, because the Bible says it. Likewise, we believe baptism is for the remission of sins, because the same Bible says it in identically the same words.

### ***"Baptism is a work, and we're not saved by works"***

This line of thinking states that baptism is a work, or a thing done, and we're not saved by works of a distinct kind, that is, works of merit. Many people in the religious world have been exposed to false teaching about baptism and we understand why they're leery of believing that baptism has anything to do with man's salvation.

Roman Catholic's believe baptism is a work of merit, i.e., the act itself merits salvation whether any faith exists behind the act or not. For example, the following quotations from several official Catholic publications show that baptism often is not an act of faith at all:

*Valid reception does not require faith ... Therefore, an unbeliever who so desires may be validly baptized even though he have no faith. (Jone-Adelman, MORAL THEOLOGY, p. 320, cited by O. C. Lambert, CATHOLICISM AGAINST ITSELF, VOL. II, Winfield, AL, O. C. Lambert, Publisher, 1966, pp. 218-222.)*

Likewise, Catholic sources teach one need not even be conscious when baptized:

*Baptize any person found unconscious and in a dying condition.* (Ayrinhac, LEGISLATION ON THE SACRAMENTS, p. 32, cited by O. C. Lambert, Ibid.)

On baptizing infants, Catholics teach:

*Many priests find this the least spiritualizing of all their works in the Church. The fact that the recipient of the sacrament is unconscious of what is being done, and often in consequences behaves in a manner not befitting the occasion, undoubtedly detracts from the solemnity of the rite.* (Ward, THE PRIESTLY VOCATION, p. 89, cited by O. C. Lambert, Ibid.)

Two of the most amazing statements showing Catholics don't view baptism as an act of faith, but a mere meritorious work, are the following:

*A miscarried fetus or embryo, no matter how small, must always be baptized - absolutely if certainly alive, conditionally if doubtfully alive.* (Gerald H. Fitz Gibbons, SPIRITUAL FIRST AID PROCEDURES, p. 3, cited by O. C. Lambert, Ibid.)

*The general rule is, of course, that a child should not be baptized until fully born. But if there is a danger that the child will die of suffocation, or from some other cause before complete delivery, it should be baptized on the first available members.* (Rumble, QUIZZES ON HOSPITAL ETHICS, p. 56, cited by O. C. Lambert, Ibid.)

These statements regarding baptism as a meritorious work not contingent on the faith of the subject are as concerning as the one who argues that since baptism is a work, it has nothing to do with our salvation. However, just because Roman Catholicism goes to one extreme about baptism, we shouldn't go to another extreme where we don't teach the truth about baptism either. The argument that works have nothing to do with salvation is just as false as the idea that meritorious works do.

For example, the statement that works have nothing to do with salvation is not just an argument against baptism, but also an argument against repentance, for it is a "thing done." Likewise, confession is a work- not a meritorious one, but certainly "unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). Similarly, faith itself is a work, for John 6:28-29 says:

*"Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent. "*

So, if works have nothing to do with our salvation, then faith itself would have nothing to do with the salvation of a person!

The truth of the matter is, GOD works in baptism. Paul said in Colossians 2: 12:

*"having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. "*

In the next verses Paul told about the power [work; operation] God does when we are baptized with this faith:

*"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. "*

When we have "*faith in the power [operation] of God,*" rather than thinking baptism has nothing to do with our salvation or perhaps even being unconscious to the act, and are baptized, God forgives us our sins, and raises us up with Christ to walk in newness of life.

A couple of final points on this issue:

1. Baptism is the most PASSIVE act (or work) of faith required to receive Christ and the blessings He provides. In other words, "believing" is something we must DO, "repenting" is something we must DO, and "confessing Christ" is something we must DO. Baptism, on the other hand, is something DONE TO US.

"Faith," "repentance," and "confession" are all ACTIVE acts of faith on our part. "Baptism" is but a PASSIVE act of faith in which we submit to the working of God in our lives (cf. Colossians 2:12).

To object to baptism because it requires us to "do" something would require one to object to "faith," "repentance," and "confession," for they also require us to "do" something!

2. It helps to think of baptism as a "spiritual operation" in which the "Great Physician" does His Work. When we need surgery our faith in the skills of a physician allows us to submit to the operating table. Likewise, our faith in God and in the death of His Son for our sins prompts us to submit to the "spiritual operation" of baptism, in which God does His wonderful work of cleansing by the blood of Jesus and regeneration by the Holy Spirit (Timothy 3:5).

***"Paul said Christ didn't send him to baptize,  
therefore baptism must not be essential to salvation"***

Those who take this position use 1 Corinthians 1:11-17 to substantiate their view:

*"My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. "*

Rather than showing Paul didn't think baptism was very important, this passage demonstrates the essentiality of baptism.

First, notice the context of these words.

Corinth, a church wracked with nearly every conceivable problem, also had a problem with its attitude toward preachers. In this very passage, Paul mentioned that he learned they were divided over the preacher who baptized them. In this context, Paul said he was glad he hadn't baptized any more of them than he had.

This was not because he didn't think baptism was important, but lest any man should say that he was baptized into Paul's name. Indeed, Paul baptized a few of them while there. Many were baptized by other men, as Luke's account of Paul's work in Corinth in Acts 18:8 shows:

*"Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized. "*

So many were baptized, yet because of the specific problem in Corinth, Paul was glad that he hadn't personally baptized more of them, lest an even greater number would be calling themselves after him.

Secondly, note the structure of Paul's language.

1 Corinthians 1:17, *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"* is an excellent example of an *ellipsis*, a figure of speech where certain words not directly expressed are understood. Other scriptural examples illustrate how we are to interpret these words. For example, in 1 Peter 3:3-4, Peter said ...

*"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. "*

In this passage, which is similar in construction to 1 Corinthians 1:17, Peter didn't forbid putting on apparel - surely women were to adorn themselves with clothing, but he placed the emphasis upon women's inward adorning, the adorning of their spirit!

Similarly, in John 6:27, Jesus used this construction when He said:

*"Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. "*

Plainly, Jesus didn't prohibit working for physical food (Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3: 10 said: *" ... If a man will not work, he shall not eat. "*) but He showed where we should place the emphasis, i.e., spiritual food should take precedence over physical food.

Likewise, when Paul said Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach, he didn't depreciate baptism. Christ merely showed where Paul should place the emphasis, i.e., upon preaching the word of God. When the apostles delivered the gospel, it was more important that they preach. At that time, not just anybody could teach the word of God, but anybody could baptize! Thus, the apostles rightly emphasized their preaching over baptizing believers themselves.

In addition, Luke in Acts 18:8 said Crispus believed, whereas Paul said Crispus was baptized in his account in 1 Corinthians 1:14. This merely shows that "belief" in the Bible included baptism. Crispus was a believer because he placed his confidence in Christ enough to obey Him - he believed in Christ enough to be baptized for the remission of his sins!

In this passage Paul also taught two things must happen before one may call himself after another person. He said for one to call himself after Paul:

1. Paul would have to be crucified for the person, and;
2. The person would have to be baptized in the name of Paul.

That neither of these was true should prohibit the Corinthians from calling themselves after Paul.

Consider carefully what Paul's argument means positively: For one to be called after Christ, two things must happen:

1. Christ would have to die for the person, and;
2. The person would have to be baptized in the name of Christ!

Thus, the very passage used to show that baptism is not essential proves belief includes baptism (as it did in the case of Crispus) and for one to be called a "Christian," he must be baptized in the name of Christ!

## ***"What about the thief on the cross? He wasn't baptized, and yet Jesus said he would be with him in paradise."***

The case of the thief on the cross has to be the most often offered objection to the necessity of penitent believers being baptized in our time. People argue, *"The thief on the cross wasn't baptized, and yet Jesus said he would be with Him in paradise."* This argument deserves an honest and forthright reply.

First, how do we know the thief on the cross wasn't baptized?

We automatically assume this to be the case, but maybe that's not true. Remember how John the Baptist preached and baptized in this region and the gospels tell how he met with stupendous success:

Matthew 3:1-6

*"In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. 11' John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."*

Luke 3:7,12

*"John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" ... Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"*

Suppose someone could make statements like this about the community where you live, i.e., all the city had gone out to be baptized, that all the region around your city had, that multitudes had, and even the federal employees had! Would you be dogmatic that a certain individual in your community had not been baptized?

Of course, no one knows for sure whether the thief on the cross was baptized by John's baptism. However, the success of John's preaching shows that those who assume the thief was not baptized have no basis to make this assumption. The thief evidently had a remarkable understanding of the nature of Jesus and His Kingdom, for notice that despite the imminent death of Jesus Himself, we read in Luke 23:42

*"Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. "*

Somehow the thief knew that death itself could not prevent Jesus from coming into His kingdom! Many of Jesus' closest disciples did not understand that, thinking that the death of Jesus ended all their hopes (cf. Luke 24:13-27).

Is it not possible that the thief may have been a backsliding disciple himself, having been baptized of John, then going back into his old ways, only to be caught and sentenced to be crucified, but then repenting as he sees Jesus being crucified with him?

Secondly, the new covenant / will / testament was not in effect yet.

Whether the thief on the cross was baptized in John's baptism, he was not baptized in the name of Jesus Christ! Christ hadn't commanded anyone in the world to be baptized in His name at the time Jesus was crucified. The thief on the cross was never commanded to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ!

Not until fifty days later, when the gospel was first preached in fact on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, were believers told:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)*

So the thief on the cross couldn't have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ - he wasn't commanded to! Have you been commanded to?

Suppose that someone refuses to pay his income tax and when confronted by a federal judge argues he doesn't have to pay income tax because Abraham Lincoln didn't pay income tax. That judge will inform him the laws have changed somewhat since the times of Lincoln and now demand it.

Similarly, one might argue that he doesn't have to put money in parking meters because his great grandfather was not required. He, too, will be informed that the laws have changed since great-granddad's day. We are to obey the laws we live under, not the laws someone else lived under.

Likewise, the thief on the cross lived under the law of Moses. He was not under the covenant you and I are subject to, for Christ's covenant didn't go into effect until He died (Hebrews 9:16-17). The thief never heard the words Christ directs to believers today:

*"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." - Acts 2:38*

## ***"I've been sprinkled, that's good enough!"***

Is sprinkling baptism? If God's Word was silent on the form of baptism then each one could have their own opinion. But God has spoken, so why all the confusion?

There are four basic reasons why sprinkling exists:

1. Procrastination: Delay being immersed until our deathbed.
2. Traditions of men.
3. The teachings of "original sin"
4. Because of the Greek word "baptizo" was not translated, but transliterated. This means letters of the English alphabet represent Greek letters. When "baptizo" is translated, it means: *"to immerse or dip."*

Since God has spoken, does it seem wise to follow man-made substitutes for baptism?

## **What God Said**

### **Buried with Christ**

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 6:4, *"We were BURIED with Christ by baptism (translated immersion)."* The word "buried" describes the action of baptism and pictures for us the three great facts of the Gospel: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any baptism which blurs this picture discredits the greatest message God gave to man.

The Bible says they *"went down into the water ... and they came up out of the water"* (Acts 8:39).

Since baptism is a burial in water, how can one be 'buried' into something smaller than himself, that is, a cup or bowl of water?

## Sprinkling was unknown in Apostolic times

Sprinkling is not mentioned as being practiced by Christians anywhere in the New Testament nor in any other historical book until all the Apostles of Christ were dead. We're admonished to *"Continue steadfastly in the Apostles teaching"* (Acts 2:42). See warnings about "adding to" the scriptures (Revelation 22: 18-19).

To accept more than one baptism is unscriptural. As early as 62 AD. Paul says there is "ONE BAPTISM" (Eph 4:5). This "one baptism was to be a "burial" in water and was to be administered to men, till Jesus comes again (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 10:47; Col. 2:12).

We've been told that we're born with sin, that we inherit the guilt of Adam's 'original sin' and thus need to receive forgiveness. But what does the Bible say?

Ezekiel 18:20 says, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die: The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. "*

Jesus said, *"Unless we become as little children, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven "* (Matt. 18:3-6).

If little children are guilty of sin then why did Jesus tell us to become like little children? The GUILT of Adam's sin was NOT passed on, but the consequences were, that is, physical death (Romans 5-12).

Infants are born pure and holy and are not guilty of sin until they reach the age of accountability and willingly disobey God's will (1 John 3:4; Matthew 19:14). Babies are not proper candidates for baptism, for they must first be taught to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, then repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9,10).

## ***"I feel saved, but I've not been baptized!"***

Just as physical life begins at conception, so spiritual life begins when we are "begotten" (conceived) by the Word of God.

*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 1 Cor 4: 15 (KJV)*

*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Pet. 1 :23 (NIV).*

By hearing God's Word, the "seed" (Luke 8: 11) is planted in our hearts and by faith we believe that Jesus is the Christ, and accept Him as Lord and Savior. Oftentimes, this can be accompanied by a feeling of relief, joy, and peace.

But is 'feeling' the final judge of truth? Have we been told to 'feel' saved? Is 'feeling' the evidence of complete obedience?

There are times in life, after we become a Christian, when we may not 'feel' saved. Are we no longer 'saved' then? Feelings change. Feelings are influenced by our environment. The Word never changes. The Word is Truth.

## What happens when we believe?

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12 (NIV)*

The Bible says that those who believe or receive Christ have the right to go ahead and become a Christian.

When Paul and Silas spoke to the jailer and his family, they were to: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus ... "* (Acts 16:30-34). *He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-- you and your household. ... "*

Why? They were unbelievers and in need of spiritual conception. They not only needed to believe the facts about Christ, but they needed to make a commitment to Christ. Therefore, Paul and Silas taught them the Word of God, and when they believed, they were given the right to go ahead and become a Christian .

*... Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.*

Some have been told that once they believe or receive Christ through the praying of a prayer (Where in scripture is that found?), they are saved. Yet John 1: 12 indicates that only conception has taken place. This explains why some 'feel' spiritually alive. They have yielded to Christ, but Jesus says a birth must take place.

## Consider Paul's Conversion Experience

Acts 9:1-19

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" ("Lord" evidence of belief) Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, " he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus (Obedience, did as he was told). For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias .... Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-- has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. (NIV)*

And from Paul's own words, when retelling about his conversion as recorded above:

*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'* Acts 22: 16  
(NIV)

Paul experienced many emotions in his conversion experience. What emotion (feeling) might he have experienced when blinded by the light? What emotion (feeling) might he have experienced when he is unable to see for three days? He did not eat or drink anything for three days. And yet after three days of believing in Jesus, repenting, praying and fasting, Paul (Saul) was still in his sins, for he was told: *Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'*

## Consider Peter's Instruction

In Acts 2, Peter had just preached the first sermon. He told about the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus, whom the people had just put to death. In verse 37 we read the people experienced a 'feeling': *"the people heard this and they were cut to the heart ... "* They were convicted, they felt bad. They believed what Peter told them about Jesus Christ was true. Was that enough? They asked, *"what shall we do?"*

Peter told them what to do: *"Repent and be baptized everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the promise is for you and for your children and for future generations. "*

Keep in mind, there is some life before birth. The jailor and his family were not told to BELIEVE ONLY. Jesus said, *"Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved."* (Mark 16:16). If we refuse to believe, we're already condemned, for where there is no conception, there is no birth.

## CONCLUSION

When all men's ideas fall, the Bible's teaching on this subject is still the same.

Acts 2:38 still teaches baptism is for the forgiveness of sins:

*"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Acts 22: 16 still teaches baptism washes away sins:

*"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. "*

Mark 16: 16 still teaches:

*"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. "*

1 Corinthians 12: 13 still teaches that baptism puts us into the body of Christ:

*"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. "*

Galatians 3:27 still teaches baptism puts us into Christ:

*"for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. "*

Romans 6:3-4 still teaches baptism puts us into the death of Christ:

*"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*

Colossians 2: 12-13 still teaches that through baptism we obtain the newness of life:

*"having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,"*

1 Peter 3:21 still teaches that baptism saves us:

*"and 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. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, "*

The first time the gospel was preached, *"They then that received his word were baptized, "* (Acts 2:41). People today who receive the gospel do the same thing.

If you believe in Jesus Christ and have repented, i.e., determined that you will live according to His teaching, won't you confess His name and be baptized for the reasons HE said while you have opportunity?

\*Credit is given to Mark A. Copeland and Merlin Peterson for much of the information contained in this study.