

The Witness of John the Baptist pt. 3

Does Baptism Save You?

John 1:19-37

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ ³¹ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.”

³² And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³ I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Introduction

“Since **baptism** is so significant, since it is such a demonstrator of obedience, since it is such a beautiful picture, since it is the source of such joy and blessing, why is there so much confusion regarding baptism? Is the Bible confusing about it?

It’s not confusing. But there’s an awful lot of confused people – an awful lot. You say, “Why?” Because if there’s any one thing Satan wants to do in the life of a believer, it is shatter the pattern of obedience, and he wants to shatter it at the very beginning.

And if he can make **baptism** so confusing that you ignore it, then he has started you on the path of indifference and disobedience. This takes a pretty formal form sometimes. The Quakers, the Friends Church, the Salvation Army, Hyper-dispensationalists, all deny that **baptism** has any place in the believer's life. They reject it altogether.

On the other hand, Churches of Christ say it saves you. You can't be saved without the water, and if you just believe and don't get baptized, you'll go to hell. One errs on the side of grace, the other errs on the side of law. One ignores the command to obedience, the other ignores the salvation through faith.

And then there are the Mormons and they baptize each other for the dead – proxy baptism. It's not uncommon in one year alone for them to have three million proxy baptisms for three million dead people.

And then the Roman Catholic Church introduced something that has really threatened the sanity of the church with regard to this ordinance. It's called "infant baptism." The Roman Catholic Church began infant **baptism** as a ritual of regeneration. You must understand that Roman Catholic theology teaches that water cleanses a baby from original sin and results in regeneration. They believe that. By the way, until the Middle Ages they immersed all the babies and then they started sprinkling them after that.

And Roman Catholic theology teaches that a baby dies, a baby that dies without being christened or without being baptized, sprinkled – get this – any baby that dies without that goes to the Limbo of the Innocents – upper case, that's a place – the Limbo of the Innocents – where they will live forever enjoying a natural bliss without any vision of God. And so they want to baptize every Catholic baby so that if it dies, it can go to a bliss that has the vision of God and not get stuck in the second-class category known as the Limbo of the Innocents. They believe literally that

that **baptism** has the regenerative capability of ushering that baby into the presence of God.

Martin Luther, was strong on justification by faith but never disentangled himself from Roman infant **baptism** and the sacramentalism. In fact, he wrote a book called The Small Baptismal Book. 1526, he wrote it. He never shook the grave clothes of infant baptism, and he wrote the book which is the manual for the Lutherans on infant baptism. And he believed that baptizing a baby brought regeneration to the baby, cleansed the baby of sin, and when he was asked, “How can you affirm that if you believe justification by faith?” And he said, “Well, somehow a baby must be able to believe.” Which was a bizarre kind of thing which showed the difficulty that he had in the disentangling.

Here’s the prayer that the priest prays and the Lutheran clergyman prays at the **baptism** of an infant: “*O Almighty, I invoke Thee concerning this child, Thy servant, who asks for the gift of Thy **baptism** and desires Thy grace through the spiritual new birth. Receive him, O Lord, and thus extend now the good to him who knocks that he may obtain the eternal blessing of this heavenly bath and receive the promised kingdom of Thy gift through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*” You’re praying that the bath will **save** the baby.

Then the parents are drawn alongside, and the questions are directed at the baby and the parents are supposed to answer. “Dost thou renounce the devil and all his works and nature?” The parents reply, “Yes” on behalf of the baby. “Dost thou believe in God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son and in the Holy Spirit and in the one Christian church?” The parents say, “Yes,” whereupon the baby is baptized. Then the closing prayer: “The Almighty God hath begotten thee anew through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven thee all thy sins. Amen.”

That is a travesty on New Testament teaching. There is nothing in the New Testament about babies being baptized. There is nothing in the New Testament about salvation apart from personal

faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which comes to one who understands the meaning of the gospel. There is no infant **baptism** in the Bible whatsoever. It isn't commanded, it isn't illustrated, it isn't done, it isn't there.

You say, "Why did they do it?" Early on, the Roman Catholic Church did it to secure everybody into the system. They wanted to wrap everybody into the system and so they baptized all the babies, made them quote/unquote "Christians," then they belonged to the church, they were under the control of the church, they were under the domination of the church. Even the Reformed view of infant baptism, which is a little different than this, which is the idea that Christian parents can baptize their babies and they become little members of the covenant which is confirmed at their time when they can recite the catechism properly, that, too, is rooted in this Roman Catholic system, and the idea was to embrace all the population under the power and control of the church.

Now, that leads me to another very interesting point. What obviously threatened the Roman church was a group of people who came along, a group of people who came along and said, "This is wrong, infant **baptism** is wrong. **Baptism** is only for Christians, it's only for believers. It's only for people who consciously put their faith in Jesus Christ, and that infant **baptism** matters for nothing—it is pointless, useless, it means nothing." And so they went around preaching the gospel during the Middle Ages, and they went around seeing people converted to Christ, and people being converted were then baptized and so they were called the "re-baptizers." Historically they're known as the "Anabaptists," ana being the Greek word for again. They were the re-baptizers.

It was such a serious thing that not only were they the object of the hatred of the Catholic Church, they were objects of the hatred of the Protestants who were still in a baptizing mode based upon the Catholic plan. They were still doing it the sacramental, old way with the infants, and they were so hostile – get this – that

some of the Protestants even killed some of the Anabaptists. They kept control of their people by baptizing the babies. The Anabaptists were a threat to their power, too. So during the Middle Ages, it was the Roman church baptizing infants. Afterward, even after the Reformation, it was the Protestants still baptizing babies threatened by the Anabaptists who believed only in believer's baptism. People ask me all the time, "Should I be re-baptized?" If you were not baptized according to the New Testament, if you were not immersed in water after a conscious commitment of your life to Jesus Christ after you became saved, then you need to be baptized, period, because whatever you did before was nothing. It was nothing. It's only for believers; it should be done immediately. " JM gty.org

Review:

Lesson

I. What Does Baptism Mean

What is baptism?

When we talk about baptism, what are we talking about? Let's assume we don't even know what we're talking about. Let's start at square one: What is baptism? Simply this, from a physical viewpoint:

It is a ceremony by which a person is immersed, dunked, or submerged into water. That's what it is. It is a ceremony by which a person is immersed, dunked, or submerged into water. That's what **baptism** is.

That's the physical act of baptism

Now, there are two verbs in the New Testament which affirm this simple definition of baptism,

The two verbs that are used in the New Testament are baptō and baptizō.

Baptō is only used four times. It always means to dip, to dip into, to dip into to dye, D-Y-E, and so in all those cases, it means to submerged or immerse – to dip into.

A stronger word than baptō, an intensive form of baptō is baptizō, from which we get baptize. Baptizō is used many, many times in contrast to the four times that baptō is used. The more intensive word is used many, many, many times. It always means to dip completely and is the word to drown, totally submerging, immersing, dunking into water.

The noun that is used is baptismos, and baptismos, always, in the book of Acts, refers to a Christian being immersed into water. So linguistically, the terminology always refers to immersion or submerging in water.

In fact, **baptism** became a technical term for immersion so that it was transliterated rather than translated – to translate means to give the meaning, to transliterate means to take the pronunciation of a word from one language to another without giving its meaning. In other words, baptizō became baptize. That doesn't give it the meaning, the meaning is immerse, and you could take every use of baptō, baptizō, baptismos, and translate it immerse immersion because that's its meaning. But because it has become a technical term for the ceremony of immersion, they transliterated it out of the original and left it baptize. Even in English, that word has come to mean immerse or plunge into water.

You could go through the entire New Testament and wherever you found the word "baptize" translate it immerse and you would have

the meaning properly understood. So every New Testament use of these terms – baptō, baptizō, baptismos – either requires, demands, or permits a translation of immerse or immersion.

In fact, this is so obvious and so airtight that even John Calvin, who really is at the heart of the Presbyterian church that sprinkles rather than immerses, even John Calvin said, “The word baptize means to immerse,” I’m quoting. “It is certain that immersion was the practice of the early church.” That’s what the word means, that’s what they did.

II. What Are Biblical Baptisms

A. Water Baptism

Matt 28:19

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Acts 2:38

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:41

⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*
Acts 8:36

³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷ Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away,

B. Spiritual Baptism

Romans 6:3

³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Galatians 3:27

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Colossians 2:11

¹¹ In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

C. Holy Spirit and Fire Baptism

Luke 3:16-17

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

III. Can Water Baptism Save.

A. Biblical Salvation

First, it is quite clear from such passages as Acts 15 and Romans 4 that no external act is necessary for salvation. Salvation is by divine grace through faith alone (Romans 3:22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 3:9, etc.).

Romans 3:21

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 3:27

²⁷ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Romans 4:5

⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Galatians 2:16

¹⁶ knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Eph. 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Titus 3:4

⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

If water **baptism** were necessary for salvation, we would expect to find it stressed whenever the gospel is presented in Scripture.

That is not the case, however.

Peter mentioned **baptism** in his sermon on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:38**). However, in his sermon from Solomon's portico in the Temple (**Acts 3:12-26**), Peter makes no reference to baptism, but links forgiveness of sin to repentance (3:19). If **baptism** is necessary for the forgiveness of sin, why didn't Peter say so in Acts 3?

Paul never made water **baptism** any part of his gospel presentations. I

n **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**, Paul gives a concise summary of the gospel message he preached. There is no mention of baptism. In **1 Corinthians 1:17**, Paul states that "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel," thus clearly differentiating the gospel from baptism.

Those passages are difficult to understand if water **baptism** is necessary for salvation. If **baptism** were part of the gospel itself,

necessary for salvation, what good would it have done Paul to preach the gospel, but not baptize? No one would have been saved. Paul clearly understood water baptism to be separate from the gospel, and hence in no way efficacious for salvation.

Perhaps the most convincing refutation of the view that baptism is necessary for salvation are those who were saved apart from baptism.

The penitent woman (Luke 7:37-50),

the paralytic man (Matthew 9:2),

the publican (Luke 18:13-14),

and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)

all experienced forgiveness of sins apart from baptism. For that matter, we have no record of the apostles' being baptized, yet Jesus pronounced them clean of their sins (John 15:3--note that the Word of God, not baptism, is what cleansed them).

The Bible also gives us an example of people who were saved before being baptized. In Acts 10:44-48, Cornelius and those with him were converted through Peter's message. That they were saved before being baptized is evident from their reception of the Holy Spirit (v. 44) and the gifts of the Spirit (v. 46) before their baptism. Indeed, it is the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit (and hence were saved) that led Peter to baptize them (cf. v. 47).

B. Clarification on Baptism and Salvation

One of the basic principles of biblical interpretation is the *analogia scriptura*, the analogy of Scripture--we must compare Scripture with Scripture in order to understand its full and proper sense.

Since the Bible doesn't contradict itself, any interpretation of a specific passage that contradicts the general teaching of the Bible is to be rejected.

Since the general teaching of the Bible is, as we have seen, that **baptism** and other forms of ritual are not necessary for salvation, no individual passage could teach otherwise. Thus we must look for interpretations of those passages that will be in harmony with the general teaching of Scripture.

With that in mind, let's look briefly at some passages that appear to teach that **baptism** is required for salvation.

In Acts 2:38,

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter appears to link forgiveness of sins to baptism. But there are several plausible interpretations of this verse that do not connect forgiveness of sin with baptism. It is possible to translate the Greek preposition *eis*--"because of," or "on the basis of," instead of "for." It is used in that sense in **Matthew 3:11; 12:41; and Luke 11:32.**

It is also possible to take the clause "and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" as parenthetical. Support for that interpretation comes from that fact that "repent" and "your" are plural, while "be baptized" is singular, thus setting it off from the rest of the sentence. If that interpretation is correct, the verse would read "Repent (and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ) for the forgiveness of your sins." Forgiveness is thus connected with repentance, not baptism, in keeping with the

consistent teaching of the New Testament (cf. [Luke 24:47](#); [John 3:18](#); [Acts 5:31](#); [10:43](#); [13:38](#); [26:18](#); [Ephesians 5:26](#)).

A third possibility exists, as Wallace explains in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*:

It is possible that to a first-century Jewish audience (as well as to Peter), the idea of **baptism** might incorporate both the spiritual reality and the physical symbol. In other words, when one spoke of baptism, he usually meant both ideas--the reality and the ritual. Peter is shown to make the strong connection between these two in chapters 10 and 11. In 11:15-16 he recounts the conversion of Cornelius and friends, pointing out that at the point of their conversion they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. After he had seen this, he declared, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit..." (10:47). The point seems to be that if they have had the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit via spiritual baptism, there ought to be a public testimony/acknowledgment via water **baptism** as well. This may not only explain [Acts 2:38](#) (viz., that Peter spoke of both reality and picture, though only the reality removes sins), but also why the NT speaks of only baptized believers (as far as we can tell):

Water **baptism** is not a cause of salvation, but a picture; and as such it serves both as a public acknowledgment (by those present) and a public confession (by the convert) that one has been Spirit-baptized.

Mark 16:16,

¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. ¹

this verse is often quoted to prove **baptism** is necessary for salvation, is actually a proof of the opposite. Notice that the basis for condemnation in that verse is not the failure to be baptized, but only the failure to believe. **Baptism** is mentioned in the first part of the verse because it was the outward symbol that always accompanied the inward belief.

I might also mention that many textual scholars think it unlikely that vv. 9-20 are an authentic part of Mark's gospel. We can't discuss here all the textual evidence that has caused many New Testament scholars to reject the passage. But you can find a thorough discussion in Bruce Metzger, et al., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 122-128, and William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 682-687.

Water **baptism** **does** not seem to be what Peter has in view in **1 Peter 3:21**.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. ²¹ **There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

The English word "baptism" is simply a transliteration of the Greek word baptizo, which means "to immerse." Baptizo **does** not always refer to water **baptism** in the New Testament (cf. **Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; 7:4; 10:38-39; Luke 3:16; 11:38; 12:50; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Corinthians 10:2; 12:13**).

So Peter is not talking about immersion in water, as the phrase "not the removal of dirt from the flesh" indicates. He is referring to immersion in Christ's death and resurrection through "an appeal to God for a good conscience," or repentance. Again, it is not the outward act that saves, but the internal reality of the Spirit's regenerating work (cf. **Titus 3:4-8**).

Certain theological traditions misinterpret Peter's statement **baptism now saves you** to refer to spiritual salvation by water **baptism** (i.e., baptismal regeneration). But **baptism** (from *baptizo*) simply means "to immerse," and not just in water. Peter here uses **baptism** to refer to a figurative immersion into Christ as the ark of safety that will sail over the holocaust of judgment on the wicked. Noah and his family were immersed not just in water, but in the world under divine judgment. All the while they were protected by being in the ark. God preserved Noah and his family in the midst of His judgment, which is what He also **does** for all those who trust in Christ. God's final judgment will bring fire and fury on the world, destroying the entire universe (cf. **2 Peter 3:10–12**); but the people of God will be protected and taken into the eternal new heavens and new earth (v. 13).

Peter made clear that he did not want readers to think he was referring to water **baptism** when he specifically said **not the removal of dirt from the flesh**. That he was actually referring to a spiritual reality when he wrote **baptism now saves** is also clear from the phrase, **an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. The only **baptism** that saves people is dry—the spiritual one into the *death* as well as the resurrection of Christ—of those who appeal to God to place them into the spiritual ark of salvation safety (cf. **Rom. 10:9–10**).

Just as the Flood immersed all people in the judgment of God, yet some passed through safely, so also His final judgment will involve everyone, but those who are in Christ will pass through securely. The experience of Noah's family in the Flood is also analogous to the experience of everyone who receives salvation. Just as they died to their previous world when they entered the ark and subsequently experienced a resurrection of sorts when they exited the ark to a new post-Flood world, so all Christians die to their old world when they enter the body of Christ (**Rom. 7:4–6**; **Gal. 2:19–20**; **Eph. 4:20–24**). They subsequently enjoy newness of life that culminates one day with the resurrection to eternal life. Paul instructed the Romans:

Or 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, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:3–4; cf. 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:2; 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5)

Therefore, God provides salvation because a sinner, by faith, is immersed into Christ's death and resurrection and becomes His own through that spiritual union. Salvation **does** not occur by means of any rite, including water **baptism** (**the removal of dirt from the flesh**), **but by an appeal to God for a good conscience. Appeal** (*eperotema*) is a technical term that was used in making contracts. Here it refers to agreeing to meet certain divinely-required conditions before God places one into the ark of safety (Christ). Anyone who would be saved must first come to God with a desire to obtain a **good** (cleansed) **conscience** and a willingness to meet the conditions (repentance and faith) necessary to obtain it.

Water **baptism does** not save; it is the Holy Spirit's baptizing the sinner safely into Jesus Christ—the elect's only ark of salvation—that forever rescues the sinner from hell and brings him securely to heaven. This is the ultimate triumph of Christ's suffering for them, and the pledge of triumph in their own unjust suffering.

In Acts 22:16,

¹⁶ And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

Paul recounts the words of Ananias to him following his experience on the Damascus road: "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." It is best to connect

the phrase "wash away your sins" with "calling on His name." If we connect it with "be baptized," the Greek participle *epikalesamenos* ("calling") would have no antecedent. Paul's sins were washed away not by baptism, but by calling on His name. Water **baptism** is certainly important, and required of every believer. However, the New Testament **does** not teach that **baptism** is necessary for salvation

To Believe That water baptism will enable you to be saved coupled with faith is to fall into the same error that the Galatian Christians were falling into

Galatians 5

Stand ¹fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. ⁵ For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.