

Questions about Baptism

Baptism is making a public statement of an inward conversion. Going under the water symbolizes dying to the old life and coming up out of the water represents rising up to a new life. It is an act of obedience after someone has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

We are saved by the grace of God, not by our works, which would include baptism. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

If baptism were necessary for salvation, then Paul would not have said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius...For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel..." (1 Cor. 1:14, 17).

The thief on the cross was not baptized, yet he went to paradise. Since the thief was alive on the cross after Jesus died, he entered paradise under the New Covenant (John 19:32-33). Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from our sins, not water (1 John 1:7).

Here are some verses that tell us how to be saved, but don't mention baptism as a requirement:

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Acts 2:21 "And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Acts 3:19 "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Acts 10:43 "Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."

Romans 4:5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 10:9 If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.

Romans 10:13 "For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

If baptism were necessary for salvation, it would have been included in all of the above verses, but it wasn't. However, the following verses often confuse people. Here are some comments on those Scriptures:

Acts 2:38--"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..."

The word "for" can mean "to get" or "because of." For example:

He went to the store **for** (to get) bread.

He went to prison **for** (because of) robbery.

Acts 2:38 means to be baptized for (because of) the forgiveness of sins. We aren't baptized "to get" forgiveness of sin. Rather, because our sins have been forgiven, we should be baptized.

John 3:5--Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Baptism is a symbol of death, not birth (Romans 6:3). "Born of water" does not mean baptism, but birth through the sac of water in the mother's womb--physical birth. This is confirmed by verse 6 which says,

"That which is born of flesh (physical birth) is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit" (spiritual birth).

Mark 16:16--"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

This is a correct statement. All who believe and are baptized shall be saved—as will those believers who haven't been baptized. The verse also says, "He who has disbelieved shall be condemned." It doesn't say anything about the unbaptized person being condemned.

Acts 22:16-- "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Our sins are washed away by calling on His name, not through baptism. The Greek literally reads, "Having arisen, be baptized; and wash away your sins, having called on the name of the Lord" (Ryrie Study Bible).

1 Peter 3:21—"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"Corresponding to that" means to look at the preceding verse: 1 Peter 3:20—"...who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water."

The ark saved Noah's family, not the water. The water was the judgment upon the world. Just as the ark brought them through the judgment, so Christ brings us through the judgment. Peter clarifies his statement so that no one misunderstands—"Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience."

Titus 3:5—"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

The word "washing" is not "baptisma" but "loutron." This word means spiritual cleaning, as is used in Ephesians 5:26. It is not referring to baptism because He saved us "not" on the basis of deeds which we have done."

The book of Acts records people who were saved before they were baptized:

Acts 9:17-18 Saul was saved and then baptized.

Acts 10:47-48 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. [These Gentile believers were first saved, then baptized.]

Acts 18:8 Crispus and the Corinthians believed, then were baptized.

Do we have to be baptized "in the name of Jesus" only?

Some people teach that you can only be baptized "in the name of Jesus" or you will go to hell. This simply isn't true. The Scriptures record several different phrases that are used.

Acts 2:38, 8:12, and 10:48, they baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ."

Acts 8:16 and 19:5 they baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Matthew 28:19 Jesus commanded us to baptize "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Obviously, the exact wording is not that important, especially when Acts 8 uses two different wordings. "In the name of" means "by the authority of." It is by the authority of Jesus Christ that we baptize, and He instructed us to baptize in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What is the proper mode of baptism?

The Bible doesn't give us any specific instructions concerning how to do it. The Greek word "baptizo" means "to immerse" or "to submerge." It also appears from Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, and Acts 8:36-39 that they were immersed. Sprinkling didn't get started as a practice until the 3rd century A.D.

Should infants be baptized?

There are no recorded instances in the Bible of babies being baptized. In the writings of Iraenaeus (about 200 A.D.), he gives a hint that some were starting to baptize infants. Infant baptism didn't become a doctrine in the Catholic church until the 5th century A.D. Augustine taught that infant baptism removed the guilt of "original sin." Nowhere in the Bible is this taught.

For centuries, the Catholic church has practiced the baptizing of infants. Even some Protestant churches continued this practice after they broke away from the Catholic church. However, the Bible teaches that a person must believe before he or she is baptized. An infant doesn't know anything about how to believe in Jesus. In fact, a baby doesn't even know what baptism is. Adults who were baptized as infants don't remember it happening. For many of them, the only way they know it happened was because someone told them. Baptism should be a personal decision.

When should we be baptized?

Once you receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you should be baptized in a timely manner as an act of obedience and to make a public declaration of your faith.