

Baptism - From Romans to Revelation

Barry O'Dell

The four accounts of the life of Jesus Christ have quite a few references to baptism. Immersing people in water was part of the work of John the Baptizer (Matt. 3:6; Mk. 1:4-5; Lk. 3:7; Jn. 3:23). A very informative text on John's baptism is Luke 7:29-30 which reads, "*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*" That text makes it clear that those who were baptized by John were obedient, not to John's whims, but to the "*counsel of God.*"

Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus speaking of the necessity of baptism in the "Great Commission." Those who are discipled are to be baptized "*in (eis = into) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 28:19). In other words, when a person is baptized in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, it is into a relationship with the Godhead. That is the line of demarcation that separates the saved from the lost. Mark's record of Jesus' commission states, "*Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" Consider verse 16 from another perspective: "*He will be saved.*" That is a declaration made by Jesus. Who will be saved? "*Who believes and is baptized.*" The little word *and* is what is called a coordinating conjunction and it ties to words together. "*He that believeth AND is baptized shall be saved.*" According to this verse, there are two things required to be saved - belief and baptism. There is only one thing required in order to be damned - unbelief. This is not difficult!

The book of Acts records many instances of people being baptized. Acts also contains many commands for people to be baptized. The instances are Acts 8:12-13, 34-38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5. The commands to be baptized are found in Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16. As is true with the gospels, this subject matter recorded in Acts is not difficult to comprehend. Acts is the inspired history of the spread of the gospel and establishment of the church in the first century. The apostles were being obedient to the commands of Jesus to teach and baptize people into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit - for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and in order to be added to the church for which Christ died (Acts 2:41, 47).

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The remainder of the New Testament speaks often on the subject of baptism. From Romans to Revelation we have communication from inspired writers to both congregations of the Lord's church and to individuals. As such, those final twenty-two books of the Bible do not contain one command for people to be baptized. Each passage referring to baptism seems to serve as a reminder as to why those people had been baptized. Consider the texts...

Romans 6:3-4 - "*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" The Romans were reminded that they had been baptized into (eis) Jesus Christ and into (eis) His death. While Acts does not record the establishment of the church in Rome, it is obvious that baptism was involved! The "*newness of life*" came only after they had been baptized. We also learn that baptism is a burial, not a sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of an individual.

Galatians 3:26-27 - "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" It is absolutely Biblically accurate to say that man is saved by faith. In fact, there are at least twenty things in the New Testament that we are told saves. The "*for*" of verse twenty-seven is explanatory as to how the Galatians had become children of God by faith. They had been baptized into (eis) Christ and, having done so, had "*put on*" Christ. The Greek word that is translated as "*put on*" could also be translated as "*clothed*" or "*arrayed.*" It is only in baptism that that occurs. How could we rightly say that a person is in a saved relationship with Christ before he has been clothed with Him in baptism?

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Colossians 2:12 - *“Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.”* Jack Cottrell, in his book, *“Baptism: A Biblical Study”* wrote, “In my opinion a good case can be made that Colossians 2:11-13 is the most important New Testament passage concerning baptism...One reason this passage is so important is because it most explicitly identifies baptism as the specific time when a sinner is buried with Christ and raised up with Him. Another is because it most explicitly spells out the distinctive roles of faith and baptism in the reception of salvation. Also, it clearly identifies that insofar as baptism is a work, it is a work of God.” (Cottrell, 127-128). Again, while this was not a command to the church for the members to be baptized, it was a reminder of what happened when they were.

First Peter 3:20-21 - *“Which sometimes were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* Water was the means by which God separated Noah and his family from those who were being condemned because of their wickedness. Hugo McCord’s *The Everlasting Gospel* reads, *“In the ark a few (that is, eight souls) were brought safely through the water”* in verse twenty. The waters of the flood **prefigured** (*figure, KJV; antitype, NKJ*) the burial in water (baptism) that is so often spoken of in the New Testament. Notice also that Peter connects the importance of baptism with the resurrection of Jesus - just like Paul in Romans 6 and Colossians 2!

There are several other passages that could be noted in this study. Study John 3:3-5, Ephesians 4:5 and 5:25-27, Hebrews 10:22, and Titus 3:5-7. The New Testament has so much to say about the purpose, mode, and subjects of baptism. While this topic is integral to our understanding of God’s scheme of redemption, there are

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some misapprehensions about baptism. For instance, some teach that baptism is simply an outward expression of the faith and salvation that a person has already experienced. In view of all the above passages, that is obviously a false belief. Another bad idea that some have is that baptism alone is what saves. Nothing could be further from the truth! That is akin to the *salvation by faith alone* heresy. While the Biblical text clearly states that baptism saves, there is much that precedes one being baptized into Christ. Thus, while it is important for teachers of God’s word to address baptism accurately, they must not neglect to teach the whole counsel of God on the process of salvation.

Works Cited

Cottrell, Jack. *Baptism: A Biblical Study*. 6th ed., College Press, 2002.

Assurance of Salvation

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Confidence from God’s Word. Many individuals traverse life without certainty in their salvation through Christ, yet Scripture provides clear directives that can prevent such uncertainty. It is crucial to delineate the scriptural assurances, commands, and guidelines that are provided for believers to secure and sustain their salvation.

Assurance Through Scriptural Promises. In First John, believers are assured of their eternal life, *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”* (1 Jn. 5:13). This assurance is not based on mere hope, but on the concrete promises of God’s word.

Commands to Strengthen Our Assurance. Scripture commands believers to actively confirm their salvation. In Second Peter, believers are exhorted to *“give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall”* (2 Pet. 1:10). This command stresses the importance of perseverance and growth in faith to maintain stability in one’s spiritual journey.

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Assurance of Salvation

Maintaining Our Assured State. The Bible also guides believers on how to maintain their assured state of salvation. In Philippians, the faithful are encouraged to "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12), suggesting a continuous, active engagement with their faith and obedience to God's commands.

Conclusion: The assurance of salvation is a fundamental element of Christian doctrine that the Bible addresses comprehensively. By accepting the promises of God, actively confirming our faith, and engaging in a diligent, faithful walk, believers can not only secure their salvation, but also experience a fulfilling spiritual journey marked by peace and certainty. This scriptural guidance empowers believers to navigate their lives with confidence and purpose.

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What Must I Do?

Barry O'Dell

In one form or another, the above question is found seven times in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record the occasion of a rich young ruler asking, "*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life*" (Matt. 19:16; Mk. 10:17; Lk. 18:18). It is interesting to note that in none of those passages did Jesus respond by saying, "*Nothing! Just trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross!*" In fact, each passage says that he was to keep the commandments (Matt. 19:17). This should make us think of passages like Hebrews 5:9 that tells us that Jesus is "*the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.*"

The next time we find the same question, it is recorded in Acts 2:37. After Peter had preached his sermon the crowd responded, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do*" (Acts 2:37)? Peter's answer - "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*"

When Saul of Tarsus was confronted by the Lord on the road to Damascus he asked, "*Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do*" (Acts 9:6). This question is also recorded in Acts 22:10. Jesus' response - "*Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*" Ananias was the man who then taught Saul what he needed to do. Saul spent three days in fasting and prayer (Acts 9:9-11). As he recounted those events before a mob in Jerusalem he said that Ananias told him, "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16).

After being imprisoned in Philippi, the jailor asked Paul and Silas, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved*" (Acts 16:30). The response - "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him*" (Acts 16:31-32). After hearing the gospel he washed their stripes and was immediately baptized (Acts 16:33).

Notice which answers were not given to the question...

- ~ *Accept Jesus into your heart and repeat this prayer...*
- ~ *Nothing can be done. Jesus has already done it all!*
- ~ *Pray for the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and tell you what to do.*
- ~ *Just do what seems right to you.*

Jesus turned the rich young ruler to the commandments of God found under the Mosaic covenant. Peter had been baptized in the Holy Spirit and told those on Pentecost what to do. Ananias was a messenger from God and told Saul what he needed to do. Paul and Silas did the same thing for the Philippian jailer. The only sufficient answer that can be given today would be the answers that are found in the inspired history book of the first-century church - Acts.

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The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Heard, believed, baptized (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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