



Brief Study of Baptism

The Purpose of Baptism: Is It A Condition Essential to Receive Forgiveness or a Sign of Salvation?

Is baptism essential as a condition in order for a person to receive salvation from sin, or is it simply a sign that one has already been saved? Why should a person be baptized? Are we saved by faith only without obedience? Does forgiveness of sins come before baptism or as a result following from it? What does the Word of God teach?

INTRODUCTION:

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus commands all people, in becoming His disciples, to be taught His word and be baptized.

Clearly baptism is important:

1. It is based on Jesus' own authority. He has commanded it. Anything He commands is important. Furthermore, it must be taught and practiced as revealed in the New Testament. Men have no right to change what Jesus has instituted.
2. It is a fundamental part of becoming a disciple.
3. Jesus wants everyone in the world to be taught about it.

Clearly everyone needs to understand what Jesus teaches about baptism and to be sure to practice it the way He wants it. Yet baptism is highly controversial and many people misunderstand it.

The purpose of this study is to discover what the Bible says about the purpose of baptism.

- Why should a person be baptized in water?
- What should be the goal that he/she intends his/her baptism to accomplish?
- Is baptism essential as a condition in order for a person receive salvation and forgiveness of sins?
- Or should one be baptized simply as "*a sign that one has already been saved*" and to join a denomination?

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF BAPTISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE.



BASICALLY TWO VIEWS ARE ADVOCATED.

Some people believe that one should be baptized "because of" the remission of sins -- because he/she has already received forgiveness.

Consider a person who is a lost sinner, having never received forgiveness by Jesus' blood and having never become a Christian. Some churches say that such a person must believe in Jesus and repent of sins, then at that point Jesus forgives his/her sins (some add that he/she must confess Jesus).

Hence, in this view baptism is not essential to receive forgiveness. Some even clearly teach that one should be baptized *after* he/she has been forgiven. The purpose of baptism, they say, is to provide a sign to show others that he/she has been saved, or perhaps to join a particular denomination.

"Baptism is not essential to salvation ... but it is essential to obedience, since Christ commanded it. It is also essential to membership in the church which is his body." -- Standard Manual for Baptist Churches, Hiscox (pp. 20-21), via Handbook of Religious Quotations, p. 10.

"Is baptism necessary for salvation? I don't beat about the bush about it at all. I come out with a plain, definite, no! No, baptism doesn't save, doesn't help save, and I'll go even further to say that it doesn't have anything in this world to do with the saving of a soul." - Good News, 3/2/72 (a Baptist paper) via Handbook of Religious Quotations, p. 6.

The Seventh Day Adventist "*Baptismal Vow*" requires a person, before baptism, to answer this question: "... have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and do you believe that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven your sins, and given you a new heart?" - via Handbook of Religious Quotations, p. 12.

This is why, when a person expresses a desire for baptism, most churches schedule him/her for a baptismal service someday in the future. They believe the person is saved, even though he/she has not been baptized -- so there is no hurry.

This is standard doctrine in nearly all Protestant churches (though many make no major point of it).

Other people believe one must be baptized in order to receive remission of sins.

These people teach that one truly must believe in Jesus, repent, and confess Christ, and they agree that it is the blood of Jesus that forgives a person's sins. But they believe that sins are not forgiven until the person is baptized.

This means that the purpose of baptism is to receive salvation or forgiveness. To be a Scriptural baptism, it must be done for the purpose of being cleansed or freed from sins by the blood of Jesus. Hence, a person stands pure before God only after he/she has been baptized, not before.



As long as a person is baptized, why does it matter what the purpose is?

Acts of service to God must be done from proper motives.

Romans 6:17-18 -- To be made free from sin, we must obey God from the heart. Service to God is not acceptable if we are just going through outward motions. We must understand and sincerely mean what we do.

This principle can be illustrated by other works of service to God.

1 Corinthians 14:15 -- Singing and prayer must be done with the spirit and the understanding. Outward actions are not enough.

1 Corinthians 11:26-29 -- In the Lord's supper we must recognize the spiritual meaning of the elements. If we do not discern the Lord's body, we eat and drink damnation/condemnation to our souls.

God requires the proper outward actions, but He also requires the proper motives and purposes.

2. When God authorizes an act, the purpose of the act is part of the pattern for it.

Galatians 1:8 -- We must serve God according to what He has revealed, without changing the pattern. When God reveals the reason or purpose for an act, if we do it for a different purpose, we have changed the pattern.

2 John 9 -- One who abides not in Jesus' teaching does not have the Father and Son. What does Jesus teach about the purpose of baptism? Whatever He has taught, we must abide in it. If we practice a different purpose, we are not abiding in His teaching.

Acts 19:1-5 -- In this example, some men were baptized, and they were even immersed in water. If the outward act is all that matters, their baptism would have been fine. But they had to be baptized again to do it right; so clearly there was something wrong with their understanding of the purpose. The same would be true of anyone today whose baptism did not fit the gospel pattern.

Sometimes when we teach the importance of baptism, people accuse us of emphasizing just outward actions. The opposite is true. The reason we emphasize baptism is because inner intentions and purposes do matter! When people say baptism is not necessary and we can just overlook the reason why a person is baptized, those people are the ones who are teaching that purposes do not matter. [Cf. Matthew 15:9-13; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19]

II. SCRIPTURES ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM.



salvation in relation to baptism?

Does salvation come before baptism or as a result of it? We can no more be saved before baptism than we can before believing.

It is like $1 + 1 = 2$. Take away either of the "1's" and you no longer have two. Likewise if you take away either faith or baptism, you no longer have salvation.

Someone may respond, "It says you will be condemned if you don't believe, but it doesn't say you will be condemned if you are not baptized."

The Bible does not always spell out what we have to do to be lost. It tells us what we have to do to be saved and expects us to realize that, if we don't do it, we will be lost.

Jesus says we must do *two* things to be *saved*. To be lost, you only need to omit one of them. If you don't have faith, you probably would not be baptized, and if you did it would not do any good! To be lost is easy -- just don't believe. To be saved is harder -- you must BOTH believe and be baptized.

Further, the person who has a true faith will believe that baptism is necessary. Jesus said to believe the gospel (15-16). What does the gospel say? "*He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.*" What if I don't believe that? Then I don't believe the gospel! What does the passage say about people who don't believe the gospel?

Note the difference between what men say and what the Bible says:

Men say: "*He who believes is saved and may then be baptized.*"

The gospel says: "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*"

BOTH faith and baptism are essential in order to receive salvation.

We need to heed the warning about following human doctrines that differ from the gospel (Galatians 1:8; Matthew 15:9; etc.).

2. Acts 2:38 -- Repent and Be Baptized for Remission of Sins. Where does this passage place remission in relation to baptism?

Are sins forgiven (remitted) before baptism or as a result of it? Note that the *purpose* of baptism is clearly stated: it is *for remission* of sins.

What does "for remission of sins" mean?



Consider the people to whom Peter was speaking.

If "for" means "because they already had remission," then Peter must have been talking to saved people. Was he?

He had just convicted them of the sin of killing Jesus (v. 36), and they were pricked in heart and asked what to do (v. 37). They did not already have remission, but stood in need of receiving it.

Peter then told them to "repent." If they already had remission, why did they need to repent? The command to repent proves these people were not already saved, but were still sinners needing to receive remission.

After v. 38, Peter told them to "be saved" from the wicked generation (v. 40). If they were already saved, why tell them to be saved?

Clearly these were not saved people being told what to do because they had already had forgiveness. They were lost sinners being told what to do to receive remission of sins. Hence, "for remission of sins" means "in order to receive remission."

Consider the parallel of Matthew 26:28.

Acts 2:38 says be baptized "for remission of sins."

Matthew 26:28 says Jesus blood would be shed for many "for remission of sins."

Did Jesus shed His blood because people already had remission of sins? Obviously, the answer is, "NO." He did it so people who did not have remission could receive it.

Likewise, baptism is not administered because people already have remission but so people who do not have it can receive it.

Suppose a person is baptized not realizing that this is the purpose for which he should be baptized. Suppose he believes he was saved before baptism. Would he/she be baptized in order to receive remission? How could he/she, if he/she believes he/she already has it? How then could his/her baptism be according to the pattern of God's word?

3. 1 Peter 3:21 -- Baptism Saves Us.

Noah illustrates how we are saved. V. 20 says he and his family were saved "by (or through) water." The flood water destroyed the wicked, but it also saved Noah because it bore the ark up, delivering (saving) Noah from death.



contact that blood in baptism.

4. Galatians 3:27 -- We Are Baptized into Jesus.

How many people are in Christ? Answer: Just as many as have been baptized into Him. What if a person has not been baptized into Him? Then that person is not in Him.

Why is it important to be in Christ?

- Ephesians 1:7 - Forgiveness of sins is in Christ.
- 2 Timothy 2:10 - Salvation is in Him.
- 1 John 5:11,12 - Eternal life is in the Son.
- Ephesians 1:3 - All spiritual blessings are in Christ.
- [Cf. Romans 8:1-2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 4:7]

If a person is outside Christ, he does not have forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, or spiritual blessings. But how does one come "into" Christ? He must be baptized into Christ. Then what is the condition of one who has not been baptized or who does not believe baptism is for the purpose of being saved? Hearing, believing, repenting, and confession are all essential steps toward Christ, but baptism is the step that puts a person *into* Christ. Before baptism, a person is still outside Christ, still without forgiveness and the other blessings that are in Christ. If he/she wants those blessings, he/she must be baptized for the purpose of coming into Christ.

5. Romans 6:3 -- We Are Baptized into Jesus' Death.

This verse says again (as in Galatians 3:27) that we are baptized "into" Jesus. But also we are baptized into Jesus' *death*.

Why is Jesus' death important to us? It was in His death that He shed His blood that saves us from sin! How do we come into contact with it? We are baptized into it!

Often people who teach the necessity of baptism are accused of not believing in salvation by Jesus' blood. The truth is just the opposite. We teach that baptism is necessary because baptism is where the sinner contacts the blood! Those who say you are saved before baptism are (perhaps unintentionally) saying that you can be saved without the blood, because they are teaching the sinner is saved before he contacts the blood!

In baptism we receive the benefits of Jesus' death! What then is the condition of those who say you are saved before baptism or that baptism is not necessary for the remission of sins?

6. Acts 22:16 -- Be Baptized and Wash away Your Sins.



The sinner in this story (Saul) had already done before baptism everything most churches say one must do to be saved.

He had seen Jesus on the road, clearly believed in Him, and was willing to obey Him (22:5-10; 9:3-6). He had even been praying (9:9-11). If anyone could be saved before baptism, it would be Saul. Was he saved?

Jesus had said Saul should go into the city and would be told what he **must** do (9:6). Ananias came and told him to be baptized and wash away his sins.

If sins are forgiven before baptism, Saul would have had no sins to wash away. But he had his sins till he was baptized. So today, though a person may believe in Jesus and repent, he is still guilty of all his sins till he is baptized.

That is why in Bible examples of conversion, people never postponed baptism.

Always, as soon as the sinner believed the gospel and repented, he/she was baptized immediately:

- Acts 2:41 -- *"That day" about 3000 were baptized.*
- Acts 8:36 -- *"What hinders me from being baptized?"*
- Acts 9:18 -- *"Immediately ... he arose and was baptized."*
- Acts 16:33 -- *"...the same hour of the night ... immediately he and all his family were baptized."*
- Acts 22:16 -- *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins...."*

When churches postpone baptism of penitent believers to some future date, they are not following the Bible pattern regarding the urgency of baptism. The reason they postpone baptism is that do not believe the proper purpose of baptism. They believe the person is already saved, so what's the hurry?

When we understand that the person is still in sin until he/she is baptized, then we understand why people in the Bible did not postpone baptism.

CONCLUSION:

These passages reveal that the purpose of baptism is as follows:

- Mark 16:16 -- Baptism is required in order to be saved.
- Acts 2:38 -- Baptism is for (in order to receive) remission of sins.
- 1 Peter 3:21 -- Baptism saves us.
- Galatians 3:27 -- We are baptized into Christ.
- Romans 6:3 -- We are baptized into Jesus' death.
- Acts 22:16 -- Be baptized and wash away your sins.



This was the unanimous teaching of the early Christians (see article *Baptism In The Early Church* on this site).

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