

Does Water Baptism Save?

This tract deals with the false teaching that a person cannot be born again (saved) unless they have been water baptized.

What is The Gospel ?

The gospel is the Good News that Jesus came to save us. He came into the world because He loved us. He took our sins to the cross, died for us, and rose again. We can be forgiven and saved if we repent and believe in Him.

"Then He (Jesus) opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He (Jesus) said to them, **'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem'**" (Luke 24:45-47, brackets added).

Paul received the gospel by direct revelation from God (Galatians 1:11-12). He thus preached the same gospel Jesus preached: **"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Jesus had told him: "... I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may **turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God**, that they may **receive forgiveness of sins** and an inheritance among those who have been **sanctified by faith in Me**" (Acts 26:17-18). In obedience to Jesus' command Paul was found **"solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Acts 20:21). Note right here that the gospel does not include water baptism: **"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel"** (1 Corinthians 1:17).

There is only one gospel and one way to salvation presented within that message (Galatians 1:6). The gospel includes both the basis of our salvation (what Jesus did for us on the cross) as well as the way to get saved (a call to repent and believe in Jesus):

"Jesus came into Galilee, **preaching the gospel of God**, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel!**'" (Mark 1:14-15); "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent**, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead"(Acts 17:30-31).

Our Basis: The Cross and the Blood of Jesus

We are saved because of the blood of Jesus and nothing else.

"In Him (Jesus) we have **redemption through His blood**, the **forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7, brackets added); **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ**, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19). "To Him (Jesus) who loves us and **released us from our sins by His blood ...**" (Revelation 1:5, brackets added). The **"blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7). Read also Ephesians 2:13, Colossians 1:20 Acts 20:28, Hebrews 7:25-27, Hebrews 9:11-14, Hebrews 10:19, Revelation 5:9 and Revelation 12:11.

Our Salvation: By Faith Alone

We are saved by faith alone (which implies repentance), not by water baptism. The doctrine that our sins cannot be washed away unless we go under water (as claimed by the water-baptism-saves followers) is false and an insult to the cross of Christ. It is the "Christian" cults that would have us believe that faith in Jesus is not enough to be saved.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved" (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13, brackets added). "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, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "Of Him (Jesus) all the prophets bear witness that **through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.**" (Acts 10:43, brackets added).

"... that is, **the word of faith** which we are preaching, that **if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:8-10).

(On a side note: Some water-baptism-saves advocates falsely argue that Romans 10:8-10 does not refer to how an unsaved person gets saved but applies to believers only. Their erroneous reasoning is that Paul wrote this letter to believers with the implication that these verses supposedly refer to believers and not to unbelievers. Anyone reading the entire chapter will see that his argument is wrong, because Paul specifically states in Romans 10:1 and 10:17 that he is talking about how unbelievers get saved:

Jesus taught repentance and faith in order to get saved, read Mark 1:14-15, Luke 5:32, Luke 13:3); John 6:29); John 11:25-26 and (John 6:47. The apostles continued to teach what Jesus taught, read Acts 16:30-31, Acts 17:30, Acts 20:21, Acts 26:18, Acts 26:19-20, Romans 10:8-10, 1. Corinthians 1:21, 1 Corinthians 15:11, 2 Corinthians 7:10, Galatians 2:16, 1 Peter 1:23+25 and 2 Peter 3:9.

Repentance and faith are not mental exercises but gifts from God: **"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven"** (John 3:27); **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent"** (John 6:29). God offers these gifts to all men, because He **"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"** (1 Timothy 2:4). Man is free to receive or reject God's salvation.

Repentance and faith go hand in hand, because a person cannot repent unless they believe, and if they believe they have already turned from the predominant sin of the world which is unbelief: "And He (the Holy Spirit), when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin ..., **concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me**" (John 16:8-9, brackets added). The Lord will take His new sons and daughters from there into conviction, repentance and faith for the concrete sins in their life so that they can be free.

Our Spiritual Baptism Into Christ

The water-baptism-saves error can only be believed if (1) people do not have an inner revelation of their salvation by faith - which happens at the time of their new birth and (2) people either do not know the Scriptures or do not interpret them properly.

We find literal and symbolic baptisms in the Bible. Not every baptism mentioned in the New Testament is a water baptism. In Matthew 20:22 Jesus refers to His death on the cross as a baptism and 1 Corinthians 10:1+2 describes the baptism into Moses. Read both passages in the KJV or the NKJV for the correct translation.

The most important baptism is our **spiritual baptism (immersion) into Christ** which occurs at the time of the new birth. At this point (the new birth) we cross over from spiritual death to life and are raised up into Christ and placed in Him (Ephesians 2:5-6):

"But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, **He saved us**, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but because of His own pity and mercy, **by the cleansing bath of the new birth** (regeneration) and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out so richly upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:4-6, AMPC translation).

What is The New Birth ?

The new birth is the moment when a person enters into the kingdom of God and starts his or her life as a child of God.

"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**'" (John 3:5).

Based on this verse false teachers claim that a person cannot be born again unless they have been water baptized and Holy Spirit baptized. According to their false doctrine, the birth of water is the baptism under water and the birth of the Spirit is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

In order to test a doctrine we must 1) check whether it is in line with the direct context and 2) check whether it is in line with the revelation presented in the entirety of the Scriptures.

1) Let us examine the **direct context** (John 3:1-8): First Jesus tells Nicodemus that everybody must be born again. Nicodemus does not understand and asks how a grown up man can be born again in the flesh. Jesus specifies that a person must be **born "of water" and "of spirit"**. He then explains: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). He thus contrasts "flesh" and "spirit". The birth "of water" is the natural, fleshly birth which occurs when the waters break in a mother's womb. The baby is literally born "of water". The birth "of spirit" is the moment a person is birthed spiritually, i.e. become spiritually alive by calling on Jesus for the first time. Water baptism is not mentioned here and has nothing to do with the new birth.

2) Let us now evaluate this passage in light of **what the Scriptures teach in their entirety**. God births us through faith in His word, not through water: "**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:18); "... **for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.** ... And **this is the word which was preached to you**" (1 Peter 1:23+25); "**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, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God** (John 1:12-13).

Jesus never taught water baptism for salvation. He mentions water baptism twice. The first time in Matthew 28:19 is certain and the second time in Mark 16:16 is questionable. Text critics point out that the verses 9-20 of Mark 16 are not in the original gospel of Mark and that the language used is not the language of Mark (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Mark-16-9-20.html>). In any case

Mark 16:16 does not say that a person who is not water baptized cannot be saved. While water baptism is a command, Jesus taught repentance and faith in order to be saved. The baptism verses that are used to back up the false water-baptism-saves-gospel refer to our spiritual baptism (initial immersion) into Christ.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is neither linked to a birth nor to salvation in the Scriptures. It is a gift to equip the believer for life and ministry. Jesus said: "...but **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This Holy Spirit baptism is a separate experience that is usually evidenced by speaking in tongues and also prophesying (Acts 19:6). However, the moment a person believes in Jesus he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit: "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation - **having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**" (Ephesians 1:13).

So What is Water Baptism ?

Historically, Judaism had a number of cleansing and purification rites including water baptism. It was seen as a symbolic immersion for spiritual cleansing, conversion and renewal. All Gentiles who wanted to become Jews had to go through water baptism. To this day converts to Judaism are still required to be water baptized.

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance: "John baptized with the **baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus**" (Acts 19:4). The people got baptized by John to demonstrate that they had believed John's message and repented.

For the same reason, Jesus' disciples water baptized new followers of Jesus while the Lord was still with them. After Jesus went back to Heaven they continued to baptize new disciples as a public declaration of their allegiance to Christ.

Water baptism was and is a prophetic act and a public testimony. The new Christian states that he or she wants to follow Jesus from now on. It neither forgives sins nor does it wash sins away. It comes after a person's new birth. Their sins have already been forgiven and washed by (faith in) the blood of Jesus. The immersion in water is a symbol of the previous immersion into Christ which has already happened at the spiritual new birth.

Another Gospel

We can only make disciples based on truth. Followers of Jesus must know, believe, obey and teach others what Jesus taught (Luke 6:46). The water-baptism-saves gospel is false. Jesus taught

that we are saved by repentance and faith. It is a serious matter to believe and teach another gospel:

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9).

Paul's gospel was not that we need to be water baptized in order to be saved, but that we must repent and believe in Jesus:

"... **even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;** for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation **in His blood through faith.** ... so that **He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**" (Romans 3:22-26).

In Closing

"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see whether things are so**" (Acts 17:11); "**Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching;** persevere in these things, as you do this **you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you**" (1 Timothy 4:16).

Anyone who claims that a person must be baptized under water in order to be born again (saved) is a false teacher. Such a person has not even understood the basics of the gospel of our salvation and has no right to teach (deceive) the Body of Christ.

The Biblical way to deal with false teachers is to turn away from them if they do not repent and renounce their false doctrine: "**Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them**" (Romans 16:17).

For an in-depth study on baptism read "Rethinking Baptism" at <http://his-kingdom.net/salvation.html>. For several short and very good teachings on the new birth, our spiritual baptism into Christ, water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism go to <http://www.born-again-christian.info/baptism.htm>.

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