

Does Water Baptism Save?

The historical account

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.

Jesus and the first apostles walked in this tradition. It was not before the 2nd century that the "church fathers" believed and taught that a person was not saved unless they were baptized with water: "The prescript is laid down that 'without baptism, salvation is attainable by none' chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, 'Unless one be born of water, he hath not life.'" (Tertullian 140 - 230 AD, On Baptism, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3, pg. 674-675).

Due to this belief that being water baptized was necessary for salvation, it was a logical conclusion that the earlier you were baptized, and therefore (supposedly) saved, the better - and this is how we got to infant baptism.

(Source: <http://www.unveiling.org/Articles/baptism.html>)

What is the gospel ?

The gospel is the good news that Jesus was crucified for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead and that by repentance and faith in Him we have the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life:

"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 preached the same gospel Jesus preached. He emphasizes that his gospel is "not according to man" but by direct revelation from Jesus (Galatians 1:11-12). **"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"; "solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Acts 20:21).

There is only one gospel and one way to salvation presented within that message (Galatians 1:6).

How do we get saved ?

The short and simple answer is that we are saved by faith which implies repentance: **"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).

Jesus taught repentance and faith in order to get saved: "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); "... **unless you repent, you will all likewise perish**" (Luke 13:3); "This is the work of God, **that you believe** in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29); "I am the resurrection and the life; **he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.** Do you **believe this?**" (John 11:25-26); "Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who believes has eternal life**" (John 6:47).

Jesus commanded Paul to preach repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins: "... the Gentiles, to whom 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).

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.

Genuine repentance is not a mental exercise. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins (John 16:18), we feel their weight on us (Psalm 38:4), we experience Godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) and deeply regret our sins (Matthew 5:4; James 4:9), we are heart-broken over them (Psalm 51:17). We then cry out to God to get forgiveness, and this forgiveness is just as real as our conviction and repentance is. Faith is not a mental exercise either. It is the revealing of Christ in us (Galatians 1:16), a deep inner knowledge of things unseen (Hebrews 11).

The cross and the blood of Jesus

"In Him (Jesus) we have **redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,** according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7); "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.

We are saved because of the blood of Jesus, not by water baptism. The doctrine that our sins cannot be washed away unless we go under water is false and an insult to the cross of Christ.

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.

Not every baptism mentioned in the New Testament is a water baptism, see for example Matthew 20:22 (Jesus refers to His death on the cross as a baptism) and 1 Corinthians 10:1+2 (the baptism into Moses). Read both passages in the KJV or the NKJV for the correct translation.

The most important baptism is the **new birth baptism** which is described in Titus 3:4-6. It occurs at the time of the new birth:

"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" (AMPC translation).

So what is water baptism ?

In Jesus' time water baptism was a public declaration that a person had become a believer and follower of a certain teaching. A convert would get baptized under water to show his adherence to a certain teaching or rabbi (teacher).

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 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 the blood of Jesus. The immersion in water is a symbol of the previous immersion into Christ which happens at the new birth.

Correctly handling the word of truth

"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)

"Christian" cults select a few verses, misinterpret them, and then drill these verses with their false interpretation into the minds of their followers. When this false doctrine is received, these verses eventually become a stronghold in the mind of the person that is thus indoctrinated. It becomes very hard for them to think beyond what they have been taught. They are trapped and only a serious seeking for truth can eventually set them free. That is why Jesus told His disciples to watch out and beware of false doctrine (Matthew chapter 16 verses 6 and 12). He knew that false doctrine has the potential to ruin the (spiritual) life of a person.

There are two basic principles for rightly handling the Scriptures:

- 1) The **direct context analysis** - does this passage really mean what it seems to say if isolated from its context or does the context reveal a different meaning?
- 2) Is this teaching in line with the **overall revelation** of what the **entirety of the Scriptures** teaches as truth?

The new birth - 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**'" (John 3:5).

Based on this verse some claim that a person is not born again unless they have been water baptized and Holy Spirit baptized. Supposedly the birth of water is the baptism under water and the birth of the Spirit is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This interpretation is false.

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). The birth in water is the natural, fleshly birth which occurs when the waters break in a mother's womb. The baby is literally born "of water". Likewise, a person is born "of spirit" when they get spiritually born into the Kingdom of God when they call on Jesus.

2) Let us now evaluate this passage in light of **what the Scriptures teach in their entirety**:

Neither water baptism nor the baptism of the Holy Spirit are linked to the new birth in the Scriptures. Jesus never taught that a person must be water baptized 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 (source: <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 water-baptism-saves-gospel refer to our spiritual baptism 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 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).

Salvation by faith alone - Romans 10:8-10

"... 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).

It has been argued by water-baptism-saves adherents that Romans 10:8-10 does not refer to how an unsaved person gets saved but applies to believers only. The false reasoning is that Paul wrote this letter to believers with the implication that these verses supposedly refer to believers (and not to unbelievers).

This argument is null and void, because in Romans 10:1 Paul specifically states that he is talking about the Jewish people who are not yet saved, i.e. he is talking to believers about how unbelievers get saved: "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them **is for their salvation.**" (Romans 10:1)

And then he picks up again in Romans 10:14 and explicitly states that he is talking about people who have not yet heard of Jesus. Paul concludes with Romans 10:17: "**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**" (Romans 10:17)

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

"**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)

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, water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism go to <http://www.born-again-christian.info/baptism.htm>.

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