

# 15. WATER BAPTISM--IS IT ESSENTIAL TO OUR CONVERSION AND SALVATION?

## INTRODUCTION

There are two parts to man's salvation:

First is that which the Lord has done in making man's salvation possible (Romans 5:8); and

Second, that which the Lord has commanded man to do by way of response (Acts 2:40; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12; Hebrews 4:11; and 2 Peter 1:10). The question for this study is: does water baptism come within the realm of what the Lord has commanded man to do in obeying the gospel of Christ?

### 1. DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT MENTION BAPTISM?

Yes, over 100 times in its various forms.

### 2. WHAT DOES THE WORD "BAPTIZE" MEAN?

Baptism [Gr. "*baptizo*"] is generally defined as to dip, to plunge, to immerse, to overwhelm; consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence.

### 3. HOW MANY BAPTISMS ARE MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE?

Seven. They are as follows:

1. Israel was "**baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**" (1 Cor. 10:2; cf. Exodus 14).

2. John's baptism. This was "**a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**" (Mark 1:4; cf. Matthew 21:25). Note the consequences of those who rejected John's baptism: "**But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him**" (Luke 7:30). John's baptism was limited in duration and would later be replaced by the baptism authorized by Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Acts 19:1-5).

3. Holy Spirit baptism. Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; Acts 2:1-4; 11:15-16). Note: In contrast to water baptism which was a command and administered by man, Holy Spirit baptism was a promise--not a command, and to be administered by the Lord and not by man.

4. Jesus would also baptize with fire (Matt. 3:11-12). This is probably a reference to punishment in hell by fire. cf. Matt. 5:22; 13:41-42, 50;

25:41; Mk. 9:43; Lk. 16:24; Rev. 21:8

5. Jesus and some of the apostles would undergo a baptism of suffering - (Mark 10:38-39).

6. Water baptism authorized by Christ (Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:36; 10:47).

7. Baptism for the dead (1 Cor. 15:29). Many differing interpretations are offered to explain the meaning of this passage. Nowhere does the Bible mention baptism by proxy—that is, being baptized for another. The answer may lie in the fact that before one is baptized into Christ, one is said to be spiritually dead in sins and trespasses (Colossians 2:11-14).

### 4. BY THE TIME EPHESIANS WAS WRITTEN (61 - 63 A.D.), HOW MANY BAPTISMS WERE IN EXISTENCE?

#### Ephesians 4

4 *There is one body, and one Spirit...*

5 *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*

### 5. WHICH BAPTISM REMAINED AFTER THE OTHERS HAD CEASED? WHICH WAS A COMMAND AND NOT A PROMISE? AND WAS WATER BAPTISM ESSENTIAL TO BEING CONVERTED TO CHRIST?

#### Matthew 28

19 (*Jesus to His apostles said:*) **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

Note the following examples of conversion recorded in the book of Acts:

The conversion of three thousand Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2:1-47. These people had crucified Jesus almost two months earlier and now were being convicted in their hearts of the evil they had done:

#### Acts 2

38 **Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...**

41 **Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.**

In the next chapter, the same speaker (Peter)

gives the same commandment, except in the place of the word “**baptized**” (as used in Acts 2:38) he here uses the word “**converted**”:

#### Acts 3

**19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...**

The conversion of the Samaritans is recorded in Acts 8:4-25. Note how baptism followed the preaching of Christ:

#### Acts 8

**5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.**

**12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.**

**13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip...**

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is recorded in Acts 8:26-39. Note the similar pattern in that he was baptized after Christ was preached:

#### Acts 8

**35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.**

**36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”**

**37 Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”**

**38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.**

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is recorded in Acts 9:1-18 and 22:1-16. If believing, fasting, repenting, and praying will wash away a man’s past sins, then Saul’s should have been washed away, for he had done this much (Acts 9:5-9, 11). But what was he told to do to receive forgiveness from his past sins?

#### Acts 22

**16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”**

The conversion of Cornelius is recorded in Acts 10:1 through 11:18. If just being devout, fearing God, giving to the poor and praying to God always will save a man, then Cornelius should have been saved (Acts 10:2). But Acts 11:14 implies that such was not the case, for obedience to the Lord requires this and more. When Peter told him what to do, what did he tell him to do that he had not already done?

#### Acts 10

**47 “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized...?”**

**48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord...**

Baptism was also involved in the conversions of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34) and the Corinthians (Acts 18:6-8). In all cases of conversion recorded in the Book of Acts, God extended His grace through the teaching of the gospel. Those converted benefited therefrom after they obeyed what they were told to do. Christ is our Saviour, but He has made His saving of us subject to our obedience to Him (Heb. 5:8-9).

#### 6. HOW IS ONE TO EXPRESS ONE’S LOVE TO THE LORD? Jesus said:

##### John 14

**15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

##### John 15

**14 You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.**

##### 1 John 5

**3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**

Now if one refuses or neglects the commandment to be baptized as the Scriptures plainly teach, what does this say about one’s love for the Lord?

#### 7. IF BAPTISM IS A COMMANDMENT FROM THE LORD, CAN ONE BE SAVED AND REFUSE TO OBEY THE LORD?

##### Matthew 7

**21 Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.**

##### 1 John 2

**3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if**

we keep His commandments.

**4** He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

**5** But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

Since baptism was a part of the gospel that was preached (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; 8:5, 12-13, 35-38), what are the consequences of not obeying the gospel?

### 2 Thessalonians 1

**7** ...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

**8** in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**9** These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...

### 8. WHAT THEN IS THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM FOR MANKIND TODAY?

It is part of a spiritual birth that enables one to be created anew and enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3, 7, 10-11). That includes salvation (John 14:6). Baptism, therefore, enables one to enter into and put on Christ:

### Galatians 3

**27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Those who do not enter into Christ obviously cannot expect to receive the blessings of salvation that Christ offers. Those not thus clothed with Christ are improperly attired (Matt. 22:1-14; Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:9-10; Rev. 7:13-15). Those who abide not in Christ will perish (John 15:4, 6). And the only way the Scriptures mention getting into Christ is by being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27 mentioned above and Romans 6:3 below).

In baptism one is united with Christ in the spiritual likeness of His death, burial and resurrection:

### Romans 6

**3** Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

**4** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

**5** For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection,

**6** knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Baptism enables one to enter the body (the church) of Christ **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free...** (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18).

Baptism enables one to receive forgiveness of past sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Baptism enables us to come in contact with the atoning blood and sacrificial death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 2:12; Heb. 10:19-22).

Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21; Eph. 5:26).

### 9. IS MAN SAVED BEFORE OR AFTER BAPTISM?

Baptism is spoken of as a burial (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12). Question: Do we bury the living or the dead? Romans 6:3-6 implies that one is spiritually dead and lost before he is baptized and one is resurrected to spiritual life after baptism.

If man is saved before he is baptized, then he is spiritually alive; but if he is spiritually alive, then why bury him? Outside of Christ man is spiritually dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). It is only when one comes into Christ that one finds spiritual life as a new creation (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 14:6).

When baptism **and** salvation, or baptism **and** remission of sins are mentioned together in the same verse, does the promise of remission of sins and salvation appear before or after baptism? The passages where they occur together are: Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21. And careful investigation thereof will reveal that the promise of salvation and/or remission of sins **always** comes after baptism and not before. Is it not therefore essential to our conversion and salvation?

## 10. WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED? WHEN?

Those who have reached the age of accountability and are lost in their sins (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:23; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Those who believe and are willing to confess that Christ is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32-33; Mk 16:16; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10).

Those capable of understanding, believing, and obeying the gospel of Christ (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19; Acts 8:12-13, 37)

Those who will repent of their sins and submit to the Word of the Lord (Acts 2:38-41; 3:19; James 1:21).

## 11. IS WATER BAPTISM ADMINISTERED BY SPRINKLING, POURING, IMMERSION, OR ALL THREE?

In preparing the way for the coming of Christ, John the baptizer was said to be baptizing in “**Aenon near Salim because there was much water there**” (John 3:23). If baptism was by sprinkling, why was much water needed for baptism? Then note what is said about the mode of Jesus’ baptism when He came to John:

### Matthew 3

**16 ...Jesus, when he had been baptized, came up immediately from the water...**

Could Jesus have come up out of the water without first going down into the water? So was He sprinkled or immersed? And how was the Ethiopian eunuch baptized?

### Acts 8

**38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.**

**39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.**

If baptism were administered by sprinkling, why was it necessary for both of them to go down into the water?

Baptism is spoken of as a burial (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12). Question: Do we bury the living or the dead?

### Romans 6

**4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness**

of life.

If baptism is administered by sprinkling, then why is it referred to here as a burial?

### Colossians 2

**12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.**

## ARGUMENTS SOME MAKE

### 1. IF BAPTISM IS ESSENTIAL, THEN WHY WERE SOME PROMISED SALVATION WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED?

This question is usually based on the following examples: (1) a man sick with the palsy (Matt. 9:2); (2) a woman who anointed Christ's feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50); (3) the woman who had an issue of blood (Mark 5:34); and (4) the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). In answer to this question, let us consider the following:

The following passage indicates that at least some (if not all) of these may have been baptized under John’s baptism:

### Mark 1

**5 And there went out unto him (*John*) all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.**

Without exception, each of these people received the above mentioned promise before Christ’s death on the cross. They were therefore living under the law of Moses and not under the law of Christ, for the law of Christ did not come of force until after Christ died (Heb. 9:15-17). Before His death, Christ was free to save anyone He so desired, but after His death, His last will and testament came of force. And now without exception those who desire to be saved must comply with the provisions of His will.

Those who died before Christ’s will came of force obviously could not submit to the baptism commanded by Christ, since such was not authorized until after His resurrection (Matt. 28:18-20).

### 2. But doesn’t “for” in Acts 2:38 mean “because of”?

Some contend that the word “for” used in this passage means “because of”--not “in order to”. In other words Peter would have had to be

saying, “Repent, and be baptized **because** your sins have been forgiven.” This argument is usually made in an attempt to justify the doctrine of salvation by faith only. As we search for the truth on this question let us consider the following:

Almost all major translations of the New Testament are unanimous in translating this passage to the effect that one is baptized “for the purpose of” or “in order to” receive forgiveness of past sins

Although the English word “for” is used in both senses (“because of” and “in order to”), the word used in the original Greek was “*eis*” and “*eis*” always has the meaning of “in order to”. Had the author intended to convey the meaning of “because of” then a different Greek word than “*eis*” would have been used. Greek words translated “because of” include “*dia*” (Matthew 13:21; 17:20; 27:19), “*apo*” (Matthew 18:7), “*pros*” (Matthew 19:8) and “*en*” (Matthew 26:31, 33).

C. The word “**for**” (*eis*) used in Acts 2:38 is also used in Matt. 26:28 in the same way. But does it mean “in order to” or “because of”?

#### **Matthew 26**

**28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for (*eis*) the remission of sins.**

Did Christ shed his blood **because** our sins were already forgiven, or **in order to** bring about the forgiveness of our sins? In like manner, are we to be baptized **because** our sins have already been forgiven, or are we to be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of our past sins?

Furthermore, whatever **baptism** is for in Acts 2:38, **repentance** is for the same thing, for they are coupled together with the conjunction “**and**”: “**Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins.**” Applying the same reasoning to repentance as to baptism, is one to repent because one’s past sins have been forgiven, or is he to repent in order to receive forgiveness of his past sins?

**3. If baptism is essential to salvation, why did the apostle Paul say, “I thank God I baptized none of you” and “Christ sent me not to baptize”?**

Read 1 Cor. 1:10-17. Some in the Corinthian congregation thought they were superior to others

because they had been baptized by notable men. Paul rebuked their divisive attitudes by declaring: “**I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name**” (Vss. 14-15). When Paul said, “**Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel**”, he was not inferring that baptism was a non-essential. Suppose he had said, “The Lord sent me not to serve the Lord’s supper”. Would that mean the Lord’s Supper is not important (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-26)? Paul’s primary mission was to preach and teach. Others could do the baptizing. Paul had become famous as an apostle and some who were baptized by him might have felt a bit superior to those baptized by Mark, Timothy, Silas, or others of less renown. This was probably the same reason why Christ did not baptize (John 4:2).

**4. If baptism is essential, would this not exclude all unbaptized infants dying in infancy?**

No. Infants have not sinned, **for “sin is transgression of law”** (1 John 3:4) and they have transgressed no law. Sin is not inherited (Ezekiel 18:20). Infants are born pure and without sin (Matthew 18:2-4; 19:14-15) and they remain that way until they become old enough to know right from wrong. There is neither command nor example in the New Testament for the baptizing of infants or little children. Instead, we read:

#### **Acts 5**

**14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,**

#### **Acts 8**

**12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.**

**5. But doesn’t Ephesians 2:8-9 say we are save by grace through faith and not of works?**

There are several different kinds of works spoken of in the Bible. There are works of God (John 6:29; Philippians 2:13) and works of Satan (John 8:41-44); there are works commanded by God (2 Peter 1:5-10) and works commanded by men (Matthew 15:8-9); there are works which men do to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1, 5, 7, 16) and works

which men do to glorify God (Matthew 5:16); there were works commanded under the law of Moses (Galatians 2:16) and works commanded under the gospel or law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). When the Scriptures teach that man is saved by faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that we are justified by works and not by faith only (James 2:24), there is not a contradiction, for the works mentioned in Ephesians 2:9 are not the same as those mentioned in James 2:14-26.

It is extremely important that we look at Ephesians 2:8-9 from the perspective of **before** conversion and **after** conversion.

**Before conversion**, we are lost in sin. Christ calls us to come out of our sinful ways. We do so when in faith we repent and turn to the Lord. But what do we bring to God to pay for the awesome debt or penalty that must be paid for our sins? We are spiritually bankrupt. We may have lived good moral lives. We may have kept some of His commandments. In our eyes we may think we have a paid ticket to heaven by bringing all our goodness and righteousness and tons of good works. But we have deceived ourselves if we do. Get this: If these things could save, there would have been absolutely no need for Christ to come to earth, teach us the way to the Father and die on the cross as our Passover Lamb (Galatians 2:21). It is as the beloved song begins: "*Just as I am without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me...*" Coming to Christ, we have nothing to plea with but our Lord's love, grace, kindness, mercy and willingness to forgive which was manifested in Christ paying for us a debt we could not pay and a debt He did not owe. Does water baptism figure in? Yes, states 1 Peter 3:20-21. This is the way our Lord has seen fit to bring us in contact with His cleansing blood. Remember how Naaman the leper was cleansed (2 Kings 5:1-14)? It was God, not the water, that healed him of his leprosy, but God made His healing of him subject to his dipping in the waters of the Jordan seven times. Remember how Jesus restored sight to a blind man (John 9:1-7)? It was our Lord, not the spittle and not the water, that gave him his sight, but our Lord made His giving sight to the man conditional on the blind man doing what he was told to do: "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," (John 9:7). Water baptism follows the same principle.

And the act of baptism is symbolic of our being buried (immersed) with Christ in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12). It's not the water that saves and gives spiritual life, but our Lord. But He has made His saving of us subject to our obedience to Him. Water baptism therefore should not be viewed as a work of merit, but rather as the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21) wherein our Lord is the one that does the work in spiritually resurrecting us from the watery grave of sin and death (Romans 6:3-5), cleansing us with His blood (Rev. 7:14), washing away our past sins (Acts 22:16), clothing us with Himself and His righteousness (Galatians 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9), adopting us as His children (Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:5; 2:19), adding us to His church, His body (Acts 2:47; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23), bringing us into fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 13:14) and bestowing upon us as His heirs, the marvelous inheritance of blessings in this life and an eternal inheritance in the life to come (Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 3:6; 1 Timothy 4:8). Baptism equates with conversion (Acts 2:38, 3:19). It is the dividing line between death in sin and life in Christ, between the burial of the carnal man and the birth of the spiritual man, the dividing line between condemnation and justification. Our past works of righteousness, good as they may be, are not what gets us across the line. But, **after conversion** works of righteousness in response to what our Lord has commanded play an **extremely** important role for the child of God who has entered **into** Christ and abides **in** Christ (John 15:1-8; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14; Hebrews 10:24; James 2:24-26; Revelation 2:5; 3:1-2; 14:13).

It is one thing to get into Christ. It is quite another to stay in Christ. Or expressed another way, it is one thing to enter into a saved relationship with Christ, it is quite another to remain in a saved relationship with Christ. To those who had entered into a saved relationship with Christ in Philippi, the following was written:

#### **Philippians 2**

**12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...**

And the apostle Paul would say of himself:

### Philippians 3

13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We cannot live wrong and die right.

### 1 Peter 4

17 For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

18 Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good [doing what is right—ASV], as to a faithful Creator.

### IN CONCLUSION

If one has been baptized, does this give one an automatic guarantee of salvation after one’s life is over if they have not been faithful until death?

### Matthew 13

41 “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,

42 and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

### Revelation 2

10 ...Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. —*Jesus Christ*

The lessons that follow in this series will address things that further accompany salvation after one is baptized into Christ.

--David W. Echols Sr.