

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

— The Bible says Yes! —

by David A. Huston

MANY HAVE ASKED THIS QUESTION over the years and many have attempted to answer it. But before this question can be answered fully and properly, we must first establish from Scripture the biblical concept of salvation. What is it? Why do we need to be saved? And what do we need to be saved from? The answer to this last question can be summed up in one word: SIN. We need to be saved from sin. As Paul wrote, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Sin is not a particularly popular subject in the day we live and most people don’t like to be thought of as sinners; but popularity has never been a reliable way of discerning truth. And the truth of the matter is: sin exists whether anyone wants to call it that or not. In fact, the word “sin” or “sins” is found 647 times in the King James Bible, which is more than enough to qualify as a major biblical doctrine.

What is sin?

Some see sin as not much more than a human failing or an inadvertent slip-up. But the Bible depicts sin as a hostile rejection of divine authority. In fact, the biblical concept of sin cannot be comprehended apart from an acceptance of the reality of divine law. Today, many do not want to believe that there are absolute standards of right and wrong established by God Himself. But if we ignore this reality, then sin can be defined anyway one chooses. If we stay in the Bible, however, then we must define sin as any violation of God’s law—it is doing what God has said not to do or failing to do what God has told us to do.

For example, the Bible says that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). This man was Adam, the first man. God had told Adam what he was free to do and what he was not free to do. He then cautioned him by saying that should he ever decide to do what he has been clearly told not to do, in that day “thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). This shows that the ultimate penalty for sin is death. This idea is reiterated by the prophet Ezekiel, who wrote, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). It is further confirmed by Paul in the New Testament when he writes, “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Some might say, “Well I haven’t done anything so bad. Maybe a few white lies. Maybe a couple of occasions of immorality.” But the Bible says, “For whosoever shall keep the

whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). How many murders must a person commit to be a murderer? How many thefts must he commit to be a thief? How many lies must he tell to be a liar? How many laws must he break to be a law-breaker? How many sins must he commit to be a sinner? If we break the speed limit on only one occasion, we are nevertheless subject to a citation and fine, regardless of whether we have kept it perfectly on every other occasion. God’s law works exactly the same way; hence the Bible declares, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Sin is therefore any violation of God’s law, whether by commission or omission, and the ultimate penalty for all such violations is death.

Why do we need salvation from sin?

Most people think of death as the termination of physical life—that moment when a person stops breathing and his heart stops beating. But according to the Bible there is also a second death. The book of Revelation says that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ and continue to practice various sins will be raised from the dead and will stand before God to be judged, after which they will be cast into a place called the lake of fire. It then concludes with these words: “This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). So we see that the penalty for sin is not merely that we will one day die; it is that we will one day be raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire. Jesus called it a “furnace of fire” (Matthew 13:42).

Now we see why sin is so serious and why we stand in need of salvation. We need to be saved from our sins so we can avoid being cast into the lake of fire.

Some people believe that human beings are born guilty and under the judgment of Adam’s sin. This is called the doctrine of *original sin*. It is this belief that forms the rationale for infant baptism. According to this view, the penalty of Adam’s sin has been transmitted to all human beings, and therefore all who are not saved will be judged as sinners. But the truth is, the only human being who will be judged for the sin of Adam is Adam. The rest of us will be judged for our own sins, our own disobedience, our own open rebellion against the authority of God. The Bible says, “The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father...the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20). God holds every human being responsible individually for his own actions and decisions.

Where is salvation found?

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul summarized what we have seen so far when he wrote, “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57). This victory over sin and its penalty is God’s great gift to mankind. For the wages of sin may indeed be death, even the second death, but “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

The only place where salvation can be found is in Jesus Christ. He alone is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). While walking the earth He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” and “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Matthew 11:28; John 6:37). Notice that not only is Jesus the source of salvation, but He earnestly invites all of mankind to come to Him. He offers us salvation as a free gift, which means that there is nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. It is given to us, apart from good works or religious practices, without cost. He paid the price, we receive the gift.

How does Jesus save us?

Since the ultimate penalty for our sins is the second death, the only hope we have is that God would somehow be willing to not count our sins against us and would help us to stop adding additional sins to our account. This is what salvation is all about. The Bible teaches that God Himself entered into His creation as one of us and died for our sins. He suffered a torturous physical death so that everyone of us could escape the horror of the second death. This is the hope of salvation.

But how does God provide us with this escape? How does He remove our personal sins as an obstacle to everlasting life? How does He not judge us for our wrong-doing yet maintain His standards of justice? The answer is: the remission of sins.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup, offered thanks, and gave it to His disciples telling them, “Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28). A short while later He told them, “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). The place Jesus was going to prepare can be understood in several ways. It can be thought of as the eternal dwelling place of the saved. It can be understood as a reference to the glorious immortal bodies of the saved. But within the context of the Last Supper, it can also be thought of in terms of the spiritual place Jesus has prepared for us during this present life. Let me explain.

Jesus knew that He would be leaving the Last Supper to go to Gethsemane where He would be arrested, taken for trial, beaten, and crucified. The impending shedding of His blood was to be “for the remission of sins.” The word translated “remission” is *aphesis* (ah’-feys-ees), a Greek word that means literally “a sending away.” In its common usage during New Testament times, it meant pardon, deliverance, or forgiveness. *Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words* says that *aphesis* means “a dismissal or release.” According to Mr. Vine, it is used of the “forgiveness” of sins and is “translated ‘remission’ in Matthew 26:28.”

The fact that *aphesis* can be translated either “remission” or “forgiveness” is reflected in the New International Version’s account of the Last Supper, which reads, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” It could

also be translated “for the pardon of sins,” “for the dismissal of sins,” or “for the release from sins.”

Since the purpose of Jesus shedding His blood was for the forgiveness of sins, it is on the basis of His sacrificial death that He has acquired and set in place the forgiveness of sins for every human being, offering Himself “once for all” (Hebrews 7:27). This means that forgiving sins is not something God decides arbitrarily from person to person or incident by incident. It is a spiritual reality He has established and which every human being may partake of by exercising the appropriate faith. In this sense, it is a spiritual place. When He left the Upper Room, Jesus went to prepare a place for us called, among other things, the forgiveness of sins. This is God’s grace toward man.

Saved by grace through faith

The question then arises: What is the appropriate faith that brings us into this place of forgiveness? Some have suggested that the answer is found in 1 John 1:9, which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...” But this was written to those who had already entered into the place of forgiveness (ref. 1 John 2:12). This verse is teaching us how to maintain a forgiven state, not how to acquire it. Others point to Romans 10:9, which states, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Again, this instruction was written to those who had already experienced the salvation of Jesus Christ (ref. Romans 1:7). It is not telling us how to become saved, but how to live as a saved person. Beyond that, the verse does not specifically mention the forgiveness of sins.

There is, however, a verse in the book of Romans that does provide insight into how a person enters the place of forgiveness. In Romans 6:3 Paul wrote, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” This verse is referencing a past experience of the believers at Rome: their water baptism. Since Jesus told His disciples that a fundamental purpose of His death on the Cross was to provide the forgiveness of sins, it follows that the way we enter into this provision is by being “baptized into His death.” Through water baptism we acquire all that the death of Jesus accomplished for us.

This idea is confirmed in Acts 2:38, where Peter declared, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” This verse specifically states that water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is “for the remission (*aphesis*) of sins.” The NIV says “for the forgiveness of your sins.”

The key word in the English translation of Acts 2:38 is “for.” It is the Greek word *eis* (ice), which *Strong’s Dictionary* defines as a primary preposition meaning “to or into (indicating the point reached or entered), of place, time, or (figuratively) purpose” (NT1915). *Thayer’s Lexicon* says, “Used metaphorically, *eis* retains the force of entering

into anything, 1. where one thing is said to be changed into another, 2. after verbs of going, coming, leading, etc., *eis* is joined to nouns designating the conditional state into which one passes, falls, etc.” Thayer goes on to say that *eis* is used “after words indicating motion or direction or end.”

Baptism is a word of motion. According to Act 2:38, a person is baptized “into” the forgiveness of sins, as though stepping out of one place and entering into another. Since *eis* always looks ahead to the place reached or entered into, forgiveness of sins is the result of baptism, not something that precedes it as some people teach. This is confirmed by the exhortation to Paul where Ananias said, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). In the New Testament, we call upon the name of the Lord by being baptized. And through this act of faith we receive God’s gift of grace: our sins are forgiven, remitted, and washed away. In this way we are saved “by grace...through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

Baptism means immersion

The word “baptize” is derived from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means to dip, to submerge, or to immerse. This definition precludes sprinkling or pouring as a mode of Christian baptism. The Greek word for “sprinkle” is *rhantizo* and is never used to refer to baptism in the New Testament. Three Greek words are translated “pour” and none of them are ever used for baptism. In the Bible, baptism is always a complete immersion.

Vine’s Dictionary says this about the word *baptizo*: “Used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another.”

Thayer’s Lexicon says, “A rite of sacred immersion, commanded by Christ, by which men confessing their sins and professing their faith in Christ are born anew by the Holy Spirit unto a new life, come into the fellowship of Christ and the Church, and are made partakers of eternal salvation.”

It is clear from biblical descriptions that New Testament baptism involves a complete immersion in water. John 3:23 says that John baptized in Aenon near Salim, “because there was much water there.” There would have been no need for “much water” if sprinkling or pouring had been sufficient. Acts 8:36 says that as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch were riding down the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” Upon confessing his faith in Jesus Christ, the chariot stopped and “they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (Acts 8:38). Clearly this baptism was a complete immersion in water. Had it been anything other, there would have been no need for them to go down into the water.

The reformer John Calvin wrote, “The word baptize signifies immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive Church.” Methodist leader John Wesley

wrote, “The biblical term buried with Him by baptism alludes to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.” This is important because baptism is described as both a burial (Romans 6:3) and a washing (Acts 22:16). Sprinkling or pouring dirt does not constitute a burial and sprinkling or pouring water is no way to wash a garment.

On one occasion, Jesus asked some men who were questioning the source of His authority, “The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?” (Mark 11:30). The obvious implication was that John’s baptism had been ordained by God Himself; and if John’s baptism was of heavenly origin, how much more the baptism of Jesus Christ? Therefore the following conclusions can be drawn:

We ought to be baptized exactly as the Bible describes.

Since Jesus was immersed and He is our example, we also ought to be immersed.

Other modes of baptism come out of non-biblical traditions, which are a poor substitute for the plain teachings of the Word of God.

The only advantage other modes offer, such as sprinkling or pouring, is convenience, which is also a poor excuse for not following the Bible. What right do we have to insist on a more convenient method than the one used by Jesus and the original Christians?

Immersion demonstrates obedience to God and respect for His Word. Why invent an arbitrary mode and then try to justify it?

Only by immersion do we retain the significance of baptism as a burial with Christ and a washing away of sins.

One further example is the baptism of Jesus. The Bible says, “When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16). A literal reading of this verse would be, “When Jesus had been fully immersed, He immediately arose out of the water.” In His baptism Jesus was foreshadowing His own death, burial, and resurrection. He was also showing His willingness to identify with those He came to save. But most importantly, He was demonstrating by personal example the way that sinners were to come to Him to find salvation from their sins.

Identification or participation?

The blood of Jesus Christ was shed for all, but it is not automatically applied to everyone simply because it is now available. The blood must be personally received by each human being on an individual basis. Each of us must enter into the remission of sins for ourselves. This is why Peter declared, “Repent, and be baptized *everyone of you....*” All

must repent, which means to take personal responsibility for your sins. And all must be baptized, for this is the step of faith that brings us to salvation. As Jesus Himself said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).

Some teach that water baptism is an identification with the death and burial of Jesus Christ. To support this view they cite Romans 6:3-8 as their proof text. But let us look objectively at what this passage actually says. First of all, it says nothing about identification. Consider the terminology the apostle used: He wrote that we were “baptized into Jesus Christ” (v.3); buried with him by baptism into death (v.4); “planted together in the likeness of his death” (v.5); “crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” (v.6); and “dead with Christ” (v.8).

These phrases describe an experience that is far more than merely identifying with the death and burial of Christ; they indicate a full participation. For example, the single Greek word translated “crucified with him” actually means to be impaled together. It suggests two people being crucified together. Similarly, the phrase “planted together” means “to grow along side with” or “to be formed together.” In the mind of God, through repentance and baptism we actually become participants in the death and burial of Jesus. His death becomes our death; His burial becomes our burial. This is what enables us to rise from the waters of baptism to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Writing in the book *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Peter H. Davids explains that Christian baptism “results in the forgiveness of sins.” He describes the call of the gospel as “to turn from one’s own way, align oneself with God’s way, pledge oneself to this in baptism and so receive forgiveness of sins.” He goes on to say, “In the modern church this is often forgotten. Many modern churches connect baptism to forgiveness of sins, but do not seek repentance first. Others call for repentance and faith, but ask people to pledge themselves to it through praying a ‘sinner’s prayer’ or signing a ‘decision card.’ Baptism then becomes an ‘extra’ and its connection to forgiveness of sins is forgotten” (page 406).

It is a grave error to view baptism as an “extra.” As the renowned Bible commentator F. F. Bruce has written concerning Romans 6, “From this and other references to baptism in Paul’s writings, it is certain that he did not regard baptism as an ‘optional extra’ in the Christian life, and that he would not have contemplated the phenomenon of an ‘unbaptized believer’” (*The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*). Proper Christian baptism is a spiritual act whereby we are immersed into Jesus Christ and all that He provided for us on the cruel cross of Calvary.

What do we receive when we receive forgiveness of sins?

According to Peter’s pronouncement on the day of Pentecost, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is “for the forgiveness of your sins” (NIV). This means that through proper baptism we can be legally acquitted for our sins. Because of this forgiveness,

which only the Judge of all men can grant, we are able to stand before God not guilty, fully justified by His blood. This means that we are released from the penalty of sin and no longer in line to be cast into the lake of fire. As Jesus said, “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Revelation 2:11).

This change in legal status from guilty to not guilty is emphasized in 1 Peter 3:21, where the apostle compares Christian baptism with the salvation of Noah through water. He says, “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.” How does baptism save us? By uniting us with the risen and living Savior, Jesus Christ. And what does baptism do for us that enables us to be united with Christ? It is the “answer of a good conscience toward God.” One of the meanings of the word translated “answer” is a legal appeal. When we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, we are making a legal appeal for a good conscience toward God.

In a similar vein, the writer of Hebrews contrasts the cleansing of the conscience with the washing of the flesh. He writes, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14). Only the blood of Jesus can purge a conscience and make it good. And the blood is applied only through Christian baptism.

Peter H. Davids agrees that this is a reasonable way of interpreting this passage, writing, “For some scholars this means a request made to God for a good conscience; in other words, it is a request made in baptism that God would purify one and forgive one’s sins.” Another way of interpreting this verse is to see the phrase “the answer of a good conscience” as meaning a pledge made in good conscience to God. In other words, a solemn and sincere commitment to God. As Mr. Davids explains, “A hypocritical response will have no effect” (*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, page 717). This is certainly correct, for the promise of forgiveness is only granted to those whose baptism is an honest and sincere faith-response to God.

Regardless of which way we interpret 1 Peter 3:21, it is clear that baptism is a necessary part of the salvation process and is the channel through which we are united to the Savior.

In addition to the legal benefits we receive through baptism, there is also a spiritual benefit. As we have seen, Romans 6:3 describes baptism as a burial into the death of Jesus. The apostle wrote that we are “buried with Him through baptism” and have therefore been “united together in the likeness of His death” (vs.4-5). Through repentance and baptism, our “old man was crucified with Him” and “the body of sin” has been “done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (v.6). Going even further, he wrote that through repentance and baptism, we have been “freed from sin.” and are “dead indeed to sin, but

alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vs.7,11). Writing to the Colossians, Paul explained that through repentance and baptism we were “circumcised with the circumcision made without hands,” which means that we have “put off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” (Colossians 2:11-12).

These passages show that through baptism, we are not only released from the penalty of sin but also from its power. Paul tells us that the “body of sin” is done away with, which means it is reduced to inactivity, rendered entirely useless. This does not mean that once we are baptized we cannot or will not sin, only that we are no longer under the power of sin, like a slave being set free from its master. Sin is no longer irresistible. Now we can freely choose not to sin.

Remission and Uniting

Before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph and said, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Notice that Jesus was to save us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. This is an important distinction. Many people today are only willing to see Jesus in His role as Redeemer; but as the Savior of man, Jesus also comes to us in His role as Ruler.

On one occasion Jesus described salvation as a new birth. When asked how a person could be born again, He responded, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The birth of water represents water baptism for the remission of sins. This is Jesus acting in His role as our Redeemer. The birth of the Spirit represents the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is God’s Spirit uniting with our spirit. This powerful experience is Jesus connecting to us as our Ruler, “for as many as are led (governed) by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14).

Salvation involves both remission and uniting. Remission removes the penalty for our sins and strips sin of its power. Uniting empowers us to live righteously apart from sin. Jesus deals with our past by remitting our sins; He deals with our present by preventing them. He is both our Redeemer and our Master.

Baptism in the name of Jesus

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He left us His name as a replacement for His physical presence. This is because a person’s name is a term that represents the presence of that person. This is why baptism must be in the name of Jesus. In Colossians 3:17, Paul instructed that whatever we do in word or deed, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Baptism involves both word and deed. This is why the Bible says that when Paul was baptized, he was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). This was both a word and a deed. And when the people of Ephesus heard Paul’s message about baptism, “they were baptized in the name

of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

This is why when the people asked Peter what they should do, he said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39, NIV).

Some churches baptize by repeating the words that Jesus spoke in Matthew 28:19. In this passage He told His disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” But the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not names, they are titles that describe how God has brought salvation to man. As the Father, God originated and brought forth the plan of salvation. As the Son, God lived on earth as a human being. It was this humanity that suffered and died for our sins. As the Holy Spirit, God fills us with His presence and governs our lives. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not three gods or three persons in one God. The Bibles plainly states that God is one!

Colossians 2:9 tells us that “all the fullness of the Godhead” is embodied in the Lord Jesus. This means that the Father’s, the Son’s and the Holy Spirit’s name is Jesus.

Jesus never said to baptize in the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He said to baptize in *the name*—singular—meaning His own name. This one name—the name Jesus—represents God in all of His saving work among men. As Peter said, “There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The only name ever used in the Bible in connection with water baptism is the name Jesus, the name that is above all other names. When a person is baptized and calls on the name of Jesus, Jesus Himself is present to forgive all his sins and to fill him with His heavenly Spirit.

The evidence of history

The testimony of virtually every church historian, regardless of denomination, confirms the truth of baptism in the name of Jesus. Here are a few examples:

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (1957)

“The New Testament knows only baptism in the name of Jesus...” (Vol.1, p.435).

The Illustrated Bible Dictionary

“Unlike John’s baptism, Christian baptism was from the first administered ‘*in the name of Jesus.*’ It is clear that, from the first, baptism in the name of Jesus functioned as the *rite of entry* or initiation into the new sect of those who called upon the name of Jesus” (p.173).

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (1951)

“The formula used was ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ or some synonymous phrase; there is no evidence for the use of the trine [threefold] name...The earliest form, represented in Acts, was simple immersion...in water, the use of the name of the Lord, and the laying on of hands” (Vol.2, p.384).

Encyclopedia Biblica (1899)

“It is natural to conclude that baptism was administered in the earliest times ‘in the name of Jesus Christ,’ or in that ‘of the Lord Jesus.’ This view is confirmed by the fact that the earliest forms of baptismal confession appear to have been single—not triple, as was the later creed” (Vol.1, p.473).

Canney’s Encyclopedia of Religions (1970)

“Persons were baptized first ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’...or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus.’...Afterwards, with the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, they were baptized ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.’” (p.53).

Hastings Dictionary of the Bible

“It must be acknowledged that the threefold name of Matthew 28:19 does not appear to have been used by the primitive church, but rather in the name of Jesus” (p.83).

The New Catholic Encyclopedia

“There is the difficulty that although Matthew 28:19 speaks of the Trinitarian formula, which is now used, the Acts of the Apostles and Paul speak only of Baptism “in the name of Jesus.” An explicit reference to the Trinitarian formula of Baptism cannot be found in the first centuries” (Vol. 2, p.59).

Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th ed. (1910)

“The trinitarian formula and trine immersion were not uniformly used from the beginning...Bapti[sm] into the name of the Lord [was] the normal formula of the New Testament” (Vol.2, p.365).

The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (1962)

“The evidence of Acts 2:38; 10:48 (cf. 8:16; 19:5), supported by Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:3, suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered, not in the threefold name, but ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’” (Vol.1, p.351).

“As with John’s baptism, so earliest Christian baptism was an expression of repentance and faith...forgiveness of sins was thought to be mediated through baptism from the first.

[Concerning 1 Cor.1:13-17] “Paul obviously takes for granted that baptism was performed ‘in (*eis*) the name of Jesus.’ Here he probably uses a formula familiar of that

time, where ‘in/into the name of’ meant ‘to the account of.’ That is, baptism was seen as a deed of transfer, an act whereby the baptisand [the one being baptized] handed himself over to be the property or disciple of the one named” (Vol.1, p.173).

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 2nd edition

“Through baptism...the one who is baptized becomes the possession of and comes under the protection of the one whose name he bears; he is under the control of the effective power of the name and the One who bears the name, i.e., he is dedicated to them.”

Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion

[In Christian baptism there was an] “identification between the baptized and Him in whose name baptism took place. The one became thereby the personal property of the other, as part of the people of peculiar possession” (Vol.2, p.377).

Remarkable Biblical Discovery, by William Phillips Hall (President of the American Tract Society: 1929)

[The words of Matthew 28:19] “were never used in baptism by the original apostles, or by the Church during the early days of its existence” and “all baptisms of those early days were commanded to be, or stated to have been performed in, or with the invocation of, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Even though Martin Luther apparently used the three titles in baptism, he defended the people in his day who used “the words, ‘I baptize you in the name of Jesus Christ,’” maintaining, “It is certain the apostles used this formula in baptizing, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles” (*Luther’s Works, Word and Sacrament II*, vol. 36).

Does it really matter?

Some might ask, “Does it really matter how a person is baptized?” But this is like asking, “Does it really matter whether or not a person does what God tells him to do?” The answer is, Yes, it matters very much. There is no place in the Bible where we are told that we are free to choose our own way of being saved. Jesus said we must come to God His way. He said we must come through Him. And since His name represents Him in the earth, we must come to God through the name JESUS.

He also said that we must come through the birth of water and Spirit (John 3:5). This means that we must not neglect water baptism as a fundamental part of the salvation process. He also said that He alone has the power to forgive sins on the earth. Therefore, since water baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, we must be baptized in the name of the Forgiver, and His name is JESUS!

Does it matter how we are baptized? You better believe it does!

What can we say about baptism?

If we are committed to using only the Scriptures as our guide, then we can make the following definitive statements about Christian baptism:

1. Baptism is the will of God (Luke 7:30).
2. Baptism must follow repentance (Acts 2:38)
3. Baptism must be an act of faith (Mark 16:16; Acts 18:8).
4. Baptism is a burial in water (Matthew 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38-39; Romans 6:3).
5. Baptism must be in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:47-48; 19:4-5).
6. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
7. Baptism is a washing away of sins (Acts 22:16).
8. Baptism prepares the way of the Lord (Matthew 3:1-11).
9. Baptism fulfills all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).
10. Baptism places us into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).
11. Baptism now saves us (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
12. Baptism is ordained by God (Mark 11:30).

Baptism is necessary for salvation. But it must be preceded by genuine repentance, it must be a response of faith, it must be a full immersion, it must be in the name of Jesus Christ, and it must be for the forgiveness of sins. Anything less is not true biblical baptism and amounts to nothing more than getting wet.

What about the thief on the cross?

Some might ask, “If baptism is an essential part of salvation, then what about the thief on the cross? He didn’t have to be baptized to be saved, so why do I?” The answer is this: While Jesus walked the earth as a man, He acted in a manner befitting His sovereignty as the Lord of heaven and earth. He determined who would be healed or delivered or saved on whatever basis He deemed appropriate at that particular time, for that particular person. Keep in mind that Jesus’ primary purpose was not to save as many people as He

possibly could, but to teach and establish principles that others could learn and follow, thus making possible the salvation of many more after He had departed. Therefore, the healings and salvations described in the Gospels were recorded primarily to teach principles concerning salvation, not to serve as examples of New Testament salvation.

Furthermore, Jesus came to inaugurate, not to demonstrate, the New Testament, which He said at the Last Supper was in His blood (Luke 22:20). One aspect of the New Testament He came to establish was water baptism in His name. Clearly this is why He told His disciples after His resurrection to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He then stated, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). He did not say, “He who is saved will be baptized” but “he who is baptized will be saved.” The New Testament plan was that after His departure, He would forgive sins based upon each person’s response to the gospel message. The response necessary for salvation included both believing and being baptized. Therefore, we understand that baptism was exclusively a New Testament requirement.

But why didn’t the thief have to be baptized? Obviously it was because he was saved *before* the New Testament went into effect, for Hebrews 9:16-17 says, “Where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.”

It is evident that Jesus Christ is the Testator of the New Testament. So I ask you: was Jesus still alive when He said to the thief, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”? Unquestionably He was still alive. Therefore, we must conclude that the New Testament was not yet in force and baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins was not as yet binding upon all men. It is not until three verses later that the Bible records, “He breathed His last” and died (Luke 23:46). Only after the Testator had died and the last of His blood had been shed was the New Testament officially inaugurated.

Why not be baptized?

No one can be saved without the forgiveness of sins, and no one can enter into the place of forgiveness without being baptized into it. This is why the Bible writers put forward that we are saved through water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. They understood that we are baptized into the spiritual reality that Jesus provided through His death; namely, the forgiveness of sins. There is no other New Testament means for partaking of this inestimable gift. Never once are we told that all a person must do is ask Jesus to forgive him and enter into his heart. This is what the apostles would have called “another gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Once a person has been baptized, he must then only confess his sins, that is, honestly admit his failures, and God, who is faithful and just, will keep him in that place which is free from sin, that spiritual place called forgiveness.

Let me conclude this article by quoting once more from Peter H. Davids, who asks, “What about people who are never baptized and yet make a commitment to Christ in another setting?” Mr. Davids’ answer is this: “For Peter this would be a strange question...for after adequate instruction in the faith, baptism in the name of Jesus was the first thing done to all converts in the New Testament period. The idea that a person would confess Christ and yet would not be baptized would be absurd to Peter. Therefore he does not consider it a question needing an answer...The normal point of salvation for Christians in the early church was baptism. Even here it is not the ritual itself or the water that saves, but the commitment that one makes to Jesus as Lord. As in Paul, salvation is a relationship. Baptism in Christianity, just as a wedding in marriage, is simply the way of entering into that relationship” (*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, page 717-718). Clearly water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is a necessary part of the way God saves us from our sins.

To those who are looking for a reason not to be baptized in the lovely name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, I say, why resist the obvious and indisputable teaching of the Bible? Instead, come to the Lord repenting and believing, and be baptized, washing away your sins in the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved; for it is in Jesus Christ that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden and you are complete in Him.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

The Bible says Yes! Clearly, definitively, indisputably, unequivocally, absolutely YES!

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

Note to the reader:

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