

# Salvation: Here A Little; There A Little

## Objections to Water Baptism Considered

### Introduction

In this lesson, we take an apologetic view of water baptism<sup>1</sup>. Water baptism certainly has its critics, particularly in the traditional denominations of today. As we have seen, the Bible clearly presents Christian baptism as complete immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ – such is the only Biblical model that we have. And yet, many religious movements are built upon ideals and doctrines that have been handed down as human tradition and so rather than searching the Bible and taking all that they find and basing their doctrine on that, they instead turn to the Bible with preconceived ideas and try to find verses to support their view, even if they ignore many others. In their effort to give philosophical and even theological reasons against the Apostolic model of water baptism, the critics invariably use familiar arguments and passages of scripture in a predictable manner. We have already considered in a previous lesson some of the supposed “exception clauses” that people try to use to argue against water baptism like deathbed repentances and people in the wild jungles who have never heard the Gospel so we will not go over that again. Let us consider some other arguments and common misconceptions used today and view them in the light of truth of the whole counsel of the Word of God.

### Is Water Baptism a Work?

It was a simple tract left on a toilet in a public bathroom that I picked up and read. Boldly, in blood-red lettering, the tract proclaimed, “water baptism is a work!” And then the tract went on to quote this scripture:

**Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

The tract then finished on the last page by saying, “you don’t need to be baptized to be saved, because that is a work” and then the tract led them in a sinner’s prayer and told them “because you have confessed, you are saved!”

Though extreme, such logic and reasoning is the most commonly used attack on water baptism. “We are saved by grace,” they will say, “therefore we do not have to do any work like water baptism.” Let’s consider this line of thinking with scripture.

First of all, a quick glance back up at Ephesians 2:8-9, will reveal that it is “by grace you have been saved through faith.” Our salvation comes by grace – that means that it is the unmerited and undeserved favor of God to give us an opportunity and way to be saved. But our salvation also comes “through faith.” Faith is more than believing but without “action” is dead. Faith is believing something so strongly that you act upon it. It does not cheapen grace in any way. An example that we have already used helps illustrate this truth. The Bible says:

**Gen 6:8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. NKJV**

That is, Noah found favor that was undeserved from God. Noah found this favor because God chose to save him from the Flood that was to come. Was this undeserved? Absolutely. In this way, Noah was saved by grace. But consider the story of Noah and consider how God saved him. God revealed that the disaster was coming and gave Noah a plan that if followed and obeyed, would save him from destruction. And so the writer of Hebrews was also correct when he wrote:

**Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. NIV**

Noah was saved by the grace of God in giving him a plan of salvation to avoid destruction. But if Noah would have said, “I’m saved by grace, therefore I don’t need to obey God’s instructions because that ark, God, is a work!” Noah

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“Apologetic” when used in this sense, does not mean “to apologize for” but rather “to defend against critics.”

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

would have died in the Flood! Because he believed God's Word, Noah obeyed God's instructions and plan of salvation and so Noah was also saved "through faith." The grace of God was that God gave him a method of salvation in the first place. The faith of Noah was that he obeyed all of what God had commanded him to do.

If Noah would have tried to do or build something that was not commanded of God, he would have been trying to build his salvation by works. For example, in fear of another Flood, the people later tried to build a great tower that would reach above the water level<sup>2</sup>. If Noah would have heard about the Flood from God and ignored God's instructions about the ark and tried to build a big tower or big mountain instead, he would have been trying to do works to bring about his salvation and been destroyed. But to call the ark a work was foolish because it was something that was God's idea and Noah was only acting in faith by obeying everything that God told him to do.

Today, the analogy still applies. If water baptism was something dreamed up by men, then it would certainly be a work and would not result in our salvation. But water baptism, as we have seen, is a commandment from God. It is a God idea. It is a part of the plan of salvation that God in His grace has presented to mankind. As a result, water baptism is an act of obedience if done according to the commandments of scripture. Like Noah building the ark, it is foolish to label it a work because we are just doing what God told us to do!

The problem with the people who view water baptism as in the tract that we mentioned is that their theology contradicts itself. What they are saying is "I don't have to get baptized in water to be saved because I don't have to do anything to be saved – I'm saved by grace." And then they immediately turn around and lead someone in a "sinner's prayer" or tell them to "confess Christ." Is not praying a sinner's prayer or confessing Christ or repenting an action? If being "saved by grace" means – as they are trying to make it – that you do not have to do any action or anything to receive salvation, then why are you leading people to take action for salvation? Furthermore, why are you leaving tracts in bathrooms, because if mankind has to do nothing to be saved, then everybody is already saved! The truth is that there are many scriptures commanding us to be baptized in water in the name of Jesus, and no scriptures of anyone leading anybody in a sinner's prayer. Water Baptism is not a work trying to earn salvation, it is simple obedience to God's Word. We are saved by grace *through faith!*

## Water Baptism as a Public Confession

Some denominations, realizing somewhat the importance of water baptism in the scriptures but still trying to adhere to a "grace only" doctrine, try to compromise by making water baptism as something that one "should do" but not absolutely necessary. Usually their line of reasoning goes something like this: "you are saved by confessing Christ as your personal savior and accepting Him into your life, but since Christ commanded you to be baptized, you should be baptized as a public confession of your faith." Water baptism is not what saves you, your simple and verbal belief has already saved you but you are being baptized to indicate publicly to all that you believed. This is important because we are to let our light shine among men." Sometimes – but not always – they will add that "water baptism is a public confession of your faith and that you are joining our local assembly."

Such logic is so common, that it almost seems right, doesn't it? The only problem is that there is not one scripture that says water baptism is a public confession of faith. Throughout the Bible, people got baptized as a result of their faith in Christ, but the scriptures do not present it as the public showing forth of something that has already happened, but rather, "Baptism does now save us" and "be baptized . . . washing away your sins."<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Bible gives numerous accounts that seem to indicate that water baptism is not a public confession of your faith that has already saved you. For example, consider the following list of baptisms:

Acts 8:25-40	Phillip baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch
Acts 10	Peter baptizes Cornelius' family
Acts 16:33	Paul baptizes the Philippian Jailer and his family
Acts 19:1-7	Paul rebaptizes the disciples of John the Baptist

All four instances cited here have some element that contradicts the common belief today that water baptism is to show forth your faith publicly. For example, Phillip baptized the Ethiopian in the middle of the desert with nobody

<sup>2</sup>

See Genesis 11.

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Peter 3:21 and Acts 22:16.

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

else around. In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts, Cornelius' family had just received the gift of the Holy Spirit with the outward evidence of speaking in other tongues which should have been a definite sign to all that they had truly believed and yet Peter still commanded water baptism. Paul baptized the Jailer and his family in the middle of the night with nobody else around. The disciples of John the Baptist that Paul met in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts had already been baptized publicly under John the Baptist' ministry but water baptism in Jesus' name was so important that Paul rebaptized them and again there is nobody else recorded around to witness the act. Teaching water baptism as a public confession of faith only may be a convenient way "to straddle the fence" theologically but it finds no scriptural support and in fact contradicts the clear teaching of scripture!

## Sprinkling and Infant Baptism

Some denominations – such as the Roman Catholic Church and its closer offshoots – teach water baptism as essential for salvation but deviate from the scriptural model in some way. Most often – and this is usually found in most Protestant circles also – they deviate by baptizing without saying "in the name of Jesus Christ." But other common deviations are that of sprinkling and the baptism of infants. As we learned in a previous lesson, the concept of sprinkling derived from the introduction of the concept of baptism of infants. Let us consider briefly the Bible's thoughts on such.

First of all, the Bible does not teach "baptismal regeneration." In other words, it is not the water and the act of baptism that brings about the forgiveness of sins, but rather God in heaven forgives and washes those sins away in response to obedient faith in His Word. There is nothing special about the water used -- "holy water" is a Catholic invention and has no special power. There is nothing special about the robes used and no robes are needed. The water need not be running or still or clear or muddy. As we will see, it is not the person who is baptizing you that makes such baptism valid. Rather it is the faith of the one who is being baptized and the name that is being called upon. Jesus said this:

**Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.**

Jesus says that "believing" is a prerequisite to a person's being baptized. It is notable that Jesus does not address people who would believe and not be baptized because such is a contradiction in terms: if you truly believe you will be baptized as Jesus commanded you!

Infant baptism, then, is invalid because an infant cannot first believe for themselves. They have not yet mentally reached a stage where they can have faith in Jesus Christ and His Word and thus are not going into the water believing God to wash their sins away. This explains why in the scripture, examples of infants being baptized are never found! For baptism to be valid and potent, the person being baptized must have faith in the Word of God and be cognizant obeying the Scriptures.

**Infant baptism  
is *never* found  
in the Bible.**



Members of the Russian Orthodox Church baptize members in below freezing temperatures

Furthermore, repentance is a prerequisite to water baptism<sup>4</sup>. Water baptism only washes away the sins – past or future – that have been repented of. Not only, then, is infant baptism not a valid scriptural practice but neither is cases where adults were baptized for social reasons only – in other words, to join a church assembly, to get married when the church rules required it, or just to fit in. For baptism to be valid, a person must have believed in Christ for themselves, repented of their sins, and be baptized believing the Word of God that their sins will be washed away. In such cases, rebaptism is advisable.

The concept of sprinkling instead of immersion was never used until the Catholic church began to sanction the baptism of infants. Because it was so convenient, sprinkling became the most common form of baptism of Catholicism. Interestingly, the Roman

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

Catholic church still officially holds that baptism by immersion is valid, although in North America, this is rarely applied. Some European branches of Catholicism and its closer offshoots still baptize only by immersion some of them even going to great extremes of breaking ice in the winter time to do so!

Sprinkling for baptism is never found in scripture and the very Greek word for baptism, *baptizo*, means “to completely immerse; to bury.” The scripture that some denominations try to twist to “prove” the validity of sprinkling is this:

**Ex 24:6-8 And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." 8 And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words." NKJV**

This took place at the beginning of Law and Moses sprinkled the people with the blood to show that a new era was being ushered in. Obviously, it is a stretch to apply this to New Testament baptism because believers in the New Testament are always immersed. If any typology is in this verse, it is that the Law of Moses did an inadequate job of covering the sins of the people and the sprinkling represented this. Since under Grace it is the blood of Jesus that covers all of our sins, we should be completely baptized in water to symbolize that we are being completely covered by His blood!

In short, there is no scriptural proof of the sprinkling of water for baptism in the New Testament. We should baptize by immersion today because of many reasons:

1. *To follow the Biblical pattern.*
2. *To follow Christ's example. He was baptized by John the Baptist who baptized in the Jordan River because there was "much water" there.*
3. *To show respect for God's Word.*
4. *To preserve the significance of water baptism as a burial with Christ<sup>5</sup>.*
5. *Other methods come from non-Biblical tradition and for desires for convenience which are inadequate reasons to not fully obey the Word of God.*

Instead of trying to make excuses and “what if scenarios” and trying to skirt the rules, simple obedience to the Biblical model is the easiest! And the Biblical model is for a believer to repent and then be fully immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Paul wrote:

**Eph 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

“One baptism” means that Paul believed that there is only one correct way to be baptized according to scripture. Although in today’s modern denominationalism, there may be many different opinions on water baptism, let us never forget that what the Bible teaches by example and commandment is truth and is the only way; the one baptism!

## Christ Did Not Send Me To Baptize

For those looking for scriptural ammunition to combat the dreaded practice of water baptism, a favorite verse is when the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and said:

**1 Cor 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.**

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<sup>5</sup> See Colossians 2:12.

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

After quoting this verse, the critic says, “see God did not send the Apostle Paul to baptize and therefore neither should we.” This is a classic example of the problems and false doctrines that can arise when you rip a verse out by its roots and fail to take in context with the other verses around it and other passages of scripture in the Bible.

First of all, the Bible records in many places that Paul did baptize people and taught it as necessary. Here is a list of just some of the other places of scripture where Paul affirmed the importance of water baptism:

- Acts 16:14-15 Lydia and her family baptized by Paul
- Acts 16:31-33 The Phillippian Jailer and his family baptized by Paul
- Acts 18:8 Crispus and many other Corinthians baptized as a result of Paul’s preaching
- Acts 19:1-7 Paul re-baptizes the disciples of John the Baptist
- Acts 22:16 Paul recounts how that Ananias baptized him at his conversion
- Romans 6:3 Paul teaches the pastors in Rome of the importance of baptism
- 1 Cor 12:13 Paul teaches on water baptism through typology of Moses’ crossing the Red Sea
- Gal 3:27 Paul reminds the Galatian church that they have been baptized into Christ

Even the preceding verse indicates that Paul had baptized some of the people to whom he was writing:

**1 Cor 1:16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)**

Realizing this truth of what Paul is not saying, let us take the scripture in context:

**1 Cor 1:10-17 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14 I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. 16(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. NIV**

In context, Paul was responding to a rift and argument that was growing within the Corinth church. It seems that the Corinth church were making a big deal of who had baptized them and were dividing into cliques based upon the person who had actually performed their baptism. The Corinthians had sadly missed the point of baptism as evidenced by Paul’s rhetorical questions in verse 13: no, Paul had not been crucified for them and neither had they been baptized in Paul’s name, but rather, it was Jesus who had died and Jesus whose name that they had taken in baptism.

The controversy stemmed from the Jewish practice of a teacher baptizing his students to show their allegiance and submission to his teachings. The Corinthian believers were emphasizing the person doing the baptism not realizing that the point was that they were baptized into the name of Jesus. Paul had baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the family of Stephanas in the Corinth church but the rest of them had been baptized by other disciples and preachers. The point often missed by pundits is that all of them had been baptized! Obviously it was not being taught as optional. When Paul said that “Christ did not send me to baptize” we must take him in context as meaning, “Christ did not send me to baptize people unto myself or to join them to me.” What Paul was saying was, “I am not trying to build a group of disciples of me who follow my teachings, but rather I preach the Gospel, the good news of Christ and it is His name whom you took on and it is His disciples you have become. Paul said that if he were preaching to build a personal following, then the cross would be emptied of its power. Paul baptized, but the emphasis was to be on Christ, not on the one doing the baptism.

## Baptism for the Dead

Another verse that is pulled out of context from Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth is the following:

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

**1 Cor 15:29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? NIV**

Some sects – for example, the Church of Latter Day Saints, better known as the Mormons – have taken this scripture and build entire doctrines upon it where people are baptized for people who have already died. People line up at the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City, Utah having researched their genealogies back to the umpteenth generation and are repeatedly baptized for ancestors that have long passed away but who may not have been baptized into the Mormon faith.

Before we look at the scripture above in context, let us realize that nowhere else in scripture is there ever taught the concept of one person being baptized in the stead of another – whether living or otherwise. Jesus said, “he that believes and is baptized shall be saved” and the one who would be saved must be the one who believes, repents, and gets baptized. My faith does not work for you and your faith does not translate to my salvation. The concept of my faith being valid for your salvation is simply not found in scripture. God has sons and daughters but no grandchildren. If you are a child of God it is because you, yourself, was born again of the water and of the Spirit!

Furthermore, there is nothing in the rest of scripture to indicate that the dead have a second chance at salvation. Rather the scripture teaches:

**Heb 9:27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,**

There is simply no scriptural support for a person being able to alter their eternal course after death, especially by the actions of other people. Such concepts – including purgatory – are inventions of men and not Biblically based.

It is dangerous, illogical, and false doctrine, then, to take one verse of scripture and build an entire theological concept and principle upon it that is not found anywhere else in scripture. Obviously, whatever Paul meant here, it is not what some make it out to be. But let us look at it in context:

In context, Paul was answering questions from the Corinth church and obviously confronting some in the church that did not believe in a resurrection of the dead. That there will be a future resurrection is the argument and subject of the entire 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians:

**1 Cor 15:12-19 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. NIV**

And so it is in this context, of confronting those who did not believe in a future resurrection of the dead that Paul addressed by saying:

**1 Cor 15:29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? NIV**

What did Paul mean? We cannot be totally sure, because we are reading the answers to the questions and not the questions themselves, but here are three possibilities to what Paul could have meant here which do not contradict the rest of scripture:

1. *Paul referred to those who became converts as a result of the deaths of Christians loved ones.*

In other words, it is possible that the baptisms referred to were not for the salvation of dead relatives but were baptisms and conversions that were a result of seeing loved ones faithful to the death as a Christian martyr. It could be that there were some who had become Christians and been baptized after having been greatly moved by

# Salvation: Objections to Water Baptism Considered

the show of faith of a loved one who gave their life for Christ. And Paul's argument is then, "if there is no resurrection of the dead, then why did you bother to become a convert?" Such is one possibility.

2. *Paul referred to errant doctrine believed by those whom He was confronting and was pointing out the contradiction in their own false beliefs.*

In other words, it could have been the very ones who did not believe in a resurrection that believed that you could be baptized for the dead and Paul was saying, "you contradict yourself in your own false doctrines: if there is no resurrection then why do you teach elsewhere that we can be baptized for the dead?" If this is a correct view, Paul is not condoning either of their false doctrines, but merely using their logic against themselves.

3. *Paul referred to the baptism of the "dead man" of your fleshly will who had been killed at repentance.*

Elsewhere, Paul taught that those who are dead to their sins because of repentance are buried with Christ in baptism so that they can be raised to a newness of life<sup>6</sup>. Viewed this way, water baptism is a representation that you believe in Christ's burial and subsequent resurrection which in case there must be a future resurrection because Christ was the "first fruits" of the resurrection to come.

Whichever of these three, Paul meant, all of them make more sense than taking one verse of scripture out of context and twisting it to mean something in exact opposites of the rest of scriptural teaching.

## Conclusion

Before we finish, there is one other verse of scripture that I would ask the critics of water baptism to explain:

**1 John 5:7-8 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.**

That is, in the true believer's life, there are three things that agree in testimony that they are a believer: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. To the person seeking to obey the Apostolic model, this scripture is easy to grasp and even easier to explain: when we obey the Biblical model of salvation, the Spirit of God, the waters of baptism, and the blood Christ all agree together in one new birth to make us a new creature and to testify that we have been born again. If you leave water baptism out, then how does the water agree with the Spirit and the blood in a believer's life!? Obviously to have the true testimony of God, you must have the testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood! Rather than searching for excuses and fanciful arguments to not obey part of God's Word, why don't we get back to simply obedience of what Christ has commanded! Or in the words of Ananias:

**Acts 22:16 What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.' NLTse**

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<sup>6</sup> See Romans 6:3-5.