

# What About Baptism?

## Fifteen Lesson Series

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## Lesson One- Earning Salvation

Many religious people argue that if baptism were necessary for salvation, then we would be working to earn our salvation. Baptism DOES NOT earn our salvation, nor does any work of obedience result in our having earned eternal life. Let us clear up this confusion!

It is true that “works” are often given a negative connotation in the New Testament. Paul says in Ephesians 2:9, “(we are saved) not of works, lest any man should boast.” It is true that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works of which we can boast. But notice that we cannot boast about our obedience to the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 1:27), and so works of obedience are obviously ruled out here. Most people see the preceding verse, Ephesians 2:8, and conclude that man has nothing to do in the plan of salvation, but notice what it says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” While grace is obviously something that God bestows upon us, faith is our responsibility. We must choose to respond to God’s grace by hearing the gospel and developing faith in God (Romans 1:16; 10:17). Works are also spoken of negatively in Galatians 2:16, but in that context, Paul is speaking of the works of the law of Moses. And in Titus 3:5, when Paul says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,” the point is simply that God chose to save man because of HIS mercy, not OUR righteousness. Not one of these verses proves that man is to be inactive in the plan of salvation. Not one denies that we must obey God to be saved.

We are told in Hebrews 5:9, “And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” And we can also see that those who are disobedient will face eternal punishment (Rom 2:6-8; 2 Thess 1:7-9). Consider also the question that was asked in Acts 16:30, “Sirs, what must I DO to be saved?” This is a biblical question, and the implication is that we must do something. Finally, in James 2:24, the inspired writer tells us, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” It should be very clear to us that obedience plays a key role in salvation. Is baptism a work of obedience? Of course. But so is faith (Jn 6:29; 1 Thess 1:3). Anything that man must do or have can safely be considered a work of obedience.

Where in the New Testament does God say that baptism is a work that earns us salvation? It isn’t there. Baptism is simply something that God has commanded us to do in order to be saved, and who are we to argue against the Almighty God? We can learn a very important lesson from Luke 17:10 where Jesus says, “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, ‘we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.’”

## Lesson Two- Water Salvation

Another common argument against the necessity of baptism is that we are somehow preaching “water salvation.” What a lot of religious people do is point out the importance of the blood and say that we contact the blood and are saved before we contact the water. There are several misunderstandings here that we need to correct.

First of all, we are in no way preaching “water salvation,” nor do we believe that the water has any saving power. Baptism is an ACT of obedience that God has commanded, and He has chosen water as the means by which we are immersed (Jn 3:23; Acts 8:36-39). It is not the water that saves us, but rather our humble and obedient response to the command of God. There is another example that makes this evident in Acts 19:3-5. Paul arrived in the city of Ephesus and found certain disciples there who had received the baptism of John as a result of the teachings of Apollos. They were dunked in water and immersed, but they were not baptized correctly, as seen later in the text. Paul proceeded to preach unto them about baptism, and when they heard him, it says, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” So clearly, the water alone is not what saves us, for these men had already been immersed. What saves us is our humble submission to the command of God and an understanding of what God has commanded.

Consider the example of Naaman in II Kings 5. Naaman was a captain in the Syrian army, but he was also a leper. When he heard of the prophet Elisha, he immediately sought to be healed by Elisha. When Naaman finally stood before the prophet, he was commanded in verse ten, “Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” In order for his leprosy to be cleansed, Naaman had to dip seven times in the Jordan River, which displeased him immensely. It says that “Naaman was wroth,” and he complained that the Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus were cleaner than the Jordan. The command of Elisha made little sense to him, just as baptism makes little sense to most people today. But when Naaman finally submitted to the prophet’s command, he was cleansed. What cleansed him? Was it the dirty water of the Jordan River, or was it his obedience? It was his obedience! While it is still true that the Jordan River was the means by which Naaman obeyed and was cleansed, the water itself had no saving power. It is the same today with baptism. Are we saved by water? No. But God has chosen water and we must obey His command.

Finally, we must understand that the blood of Christ does not deny the necessity of baptism, just as faith does not deny the blood, or vice versa. All of God’s commandments are necessary. To say that we must be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38) does not mean that we deny the blood, or that we esteem water as more important than the blood. In fact, it is our conviction that the blood of Christ is contacted through the act of baptism, as we will show later in this series.

## Lesson Three- Spiritual Baptism

Before we begin to examine the necessity of baptism, allow us to address one more argument that is often made in dealing with certain texts. What people want to do when they get desperate is say that the many passages which plainly teach that baptism is a part of God's plan of salvation are dealing with *spiritual baptism*, not water baptism. They will argue that we are spiritually baptized the moment we believe, and then later baptized as an "outward sign of an inward grace," a phrase not found anywhere in the Scriptures. This is not at all what the Bible teaches. Unless the context says otherwise, we must recognize that water baptism is under consideration.

In both the ministries of John and Jesus, we find water baptism being used. In Matthew 3:6, "And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." This happens to be the same river that Elisha commanded Naaman to dip himself into seven times (see lesson 2). We see Jesus being immersed in water in Matthew 3:16, "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water."

In John 3:23, we are told that John baptized in Aenon near to Salim "because there was much water there." And even the disciples of Jesus were busy baptizing. Water was still being used after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Consider the conversion account of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-39. In I Peter 3:20-21, baptism today is compared to the events surrounding Noah and the ark where "eight souls were saved by water." Obviously, water is the means by which we are baptized.

Notice also that spiritual baptism, or Holy Spirit baptism, is a promise (Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) and not a command, for it is administered by God, not man. Whenever you find baptism being commanded, it is safe to conclude that water baptism is under consideration. For example, when Peter commanded the people in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you," we know that he was telling them to be immersed in water. Again, whenever you find baptism being commanded, it HAS to be water baptism.

Despite what many might think, Holy Spirit baptism occurred only twice in the first century that we have record of- in Acts 2 with the apostles and Acts 10 with the first Gentile converts (keep in mind that even after the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, they were commanded by Peter to be baptized in Acts 10:48). Notice Acts 11:15-16, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, *as on us at the beginning*. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how that He said, 'John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.'" The language of Peter infers that this baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred only twice- with the apostles in the beginning and the Gentiles in Acts 10. Now why would the Gentiles receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Because up to that point, the gospel had been proclaimed to the Jews only, and it had to be proven to Peter that God now approved of the Gentiles. In Acts 11:17, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; *what was I, that I could withstand God?*" That proved to Peter that the Gentiles could now receive the gospel and be converted.

Finally, notice that the Holy Spirit was normally given to the disciples after being converted by the apostles of Christ. Acts 8:12, 14-17 is a perfect illustration of this. In verses 12-13, we find that the Samaritans believed and were baptized as a result of the preaching of Philip. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word, they sent Peter and John unto them "that they might receive the Holy Ghost." And then in verse 17, "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." These people were converted first, and then later, as a result of the laying on of the apostles hands, they received the Holy Spirit.

We have shown the error of the "spiritual baptism" argument in many different ways. As we begin to examine the various commands to be baptized, remember that water is under discussion.

## Lesson Four- The Entire Plan

While most religious people believe that man is to be completely inactive in receiving salvation, the Bible teaches plainly that we must do something to be saved. In Acts 2:37, after hearing Peter's powerful sermon, the people were cut to the heart and asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They wanted to know what they had to do to make themselves right with God, to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. After seeing the Lord on the road to Damascus, Saul asked Jesus, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" And finally, in Acts 16:30, the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" This is obviously a biblical question; one that we should be asking and striving to answer by the word of God.

There are five steps in the plan of salvation, beginning with our hearing the gospel. Paul tells us in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation," and again in 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." These two verses show the necessity of hearing the gospel, for it both saves us and produces faith in an open heart.

The second step is faith, which results from our hearing the word of God. Most people agree that faith is a part of the plan of salvation, but let us consider one or two verses. In Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas told the jailor that in order to be saved, he had to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Now, the jailor was not saved by faith alone, but without it he could not have been saved. Also, in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Understand that faith is more than intellectually acknowledging God. As seen in Hebrews 11, it involves not only hope but coming to God in humble obedience. Consider the many examples of faith in this chapter.

Third, we must repent of our sins, which is more than just being sorry for what we've done. Jesus says in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Either we must repent or perish; the choice is left up to us. Also in 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." Repentance involves a turning away from the sins we have committed. If one is a drunkard, he must stop being a drunkard. If one is an adulterer, he must stop being an adulterer.

We also find that one must confess in order to be saved. Philip required a confession from the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:36-37, and Paul tells us in Romans 10:9-10, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." And in 1 John 4:15, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." Now, what are we confessing? Our sins? That is what the denominational world might say, but that is not what the Bible says. As seen in these three passages, we are confessing the Lord Jesus, that He is the Son of God.

It should be clear that in order to be saved, one must hear the gospel, believe, repent, and confess the Lord Jesus. We are not saved by any one thing- not faith only, or repentance only, or confession only. All of the New Testament must be considered and the plan of salvation pieced together from the various conversion accounts and passages.

But there is a fifth step in the plan of salvation- water baptism, and beginning in the next article, we will begin to consider the many passages that prove this point. It will become quite obvious to you that baptism does save us, just as faith and repentance save us.

## Lesson Five- Mark 16:16

The first verse that we want to consider in proving the necessity of baptism is Mark 16:16 where Jesus says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” How can anyone read this verse and conclude that baptism isn’t essential? As obvious as this may be, there are several points that must be made, and arguments that need to be proven false.

First of all, it is vital to recognize that Jesus plainly says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” In other words, for a person to be saved, they must believe and be baptized. Does salvation in this verse come before or after baptism? After! Most religious people will tell you, “He that believes is saved and should be baptized later,” but that is not at all what Jesus says here. Are we going to accept what Jesus says, or what the world says?

Next, compare the structure of Mark 16:16 to John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.” In Mark 16:16, Jesus essentially says that belief coupled with baptism results in salvation, while in John 5:24, He tells us that hearing coupled with belief results in everlasting life. The sentence structure is exactly the same! So if we are going to deny the necessity of baptism in Mark 16, then by necessity we would have to deny belief in John 5:24, *but* then we have a contradiction between the two texts. Clearly, all three parts in the verses above, hearing the Word, belief, and baptism, are necessary for salvation.

What about the second part of Mark 16:16 where Jesus says, “But he that believeth not shall be damned.” Most denominational people will say, “You see, you see, He doesn’t say ‘He that believeth not *and is baptized not* shall be damned.’ What about that?” The answer is simple- He didn’t have to include baptism in the second part of the verse, because belief precedes baptism! If a person doesn’t believe, they will not be baptized, and even if they are, they will only be getting wet, and the result will most certainly NOT be salvation. We are not trying to elevate baptism above belief, for both are necessary- that is our entire point.

Consider this illustration- “He that eats and digests shall live, but he that does not eat shall die.” In order to live, we must both eat and digest, right? If we eat, but fail to digest, we will still die, but we cannot digest if we don’t eat. Do we have to say, “But he that does not eat or digest shall die?” Of course not. It’s unnecessary, for if we do not eat, we can’t digest. The same is true in Mark 16:16, and the obvious conclusion is that both belief and baptism are essential.

All we really need is one verse to prove that baptism is a part of the plan of salvation. Just one verse! And we have done that. Jesus plainly states that belief plus baptism equals salvation. Who are we to argue against God? Nevertheless, other passages shall be examined.

## Lesson Six- Acts 2:38

Another powerful text pertaining to the necessity of baptism is Acts 2:38. In this chapter, the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit, and Peter proceeds to preach the gospel to thousands of Jews who are gathered in Jerusalem. After Peter boldly accuses them of crucifying the Son of God, “They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?” These people obviously recognized their sin and knew that they had to obtain the salvation that was in Christ, but they didn’t know how to do that just yet. Did Peter say, “You don’t have to do anything! You already believe in Christ!” No. Peter responds in verse 38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Let us consider this powerful text in proving once again the necessity of baptism.

Notice that this is a command to be baptized, not a promise, which indicates that water baptism is under consideration. Peter, through the Holy Spirit, commands the people to repent and be baptized. He is responding to their question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” The answer should be clear. He does not tell them to pray a sinner’s prayer or receive Christ into their hearts. These people, in order to have their sins remitted, had to repent and be baptized.

While the denominational world tells us that baptism is and “outward sign of an inward grace,” the Bible tells us that it is for the remission (forgiveness) of sins. What this tells us is that without baptism, we could not have our sins remitted. This phrase “remission of sins” is found in several places throughout the New Testament. First, in Matthew 26:28, we learn that the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins. We also learn in Luke 24:47 that repentance and remission of sins would be preached first in Jerusalem (why would Jesus emphasize this point unless it was very significant?). Also, we are told in Acts 10:43, “That through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.” Now, if we can accept these three verses and agree that they are dealing with salvation, then why can’t we agree on Acts 2:38? It is interesting that many religious people will use Acts 10:43 to prove the necessity of faith, but then they will deny baptism in Acts 2:38, saying that it “has nothing to do with our salvation.”

Many people will focus on the word “for,” saying that it means “because of,” and not, “in order to.” What they have the passage saying then is, “Repent and be baptized because of the remission of sins.” The conclusion is that we are baptized because we have already been saved. But this is a ridiculous argument. Will they say the same thing about the word “for” in the other passages that we considered above? Did Jesus shed His blood *because of* the remission of sins? Of course not. The word “for” comes from the Greek word *eis* and while it can mean “because of,” it usually means “in order to.” Peter is telling the people to repent and be baptized in order to obtain remission of sins. Also, when you consider their question in verse 37, the “because of” argument makes very little sense, and Peter’s response is worthless.

## Lesson Seven- Romans 6:3-8

The message of Romans 6 is so incredibly powerful, and the fact that baptism is included in this awesome message should tell us just how important it is. Paul says, beginning in verse 3, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”

Baptism here is compared to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. We are baptized into His death, buried with Him in baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life. The point is also made in verse 3 that we are baptized into Jesus Christ. Can we be saved outside of Christ? No. So the way to be saved is to get into Him, and we do that by baptism, and there is only one way into Jesus.

When did Christ receive His resurrection body- before or after He died and was buried? The denominational world would have to say “before,” because they preach that we receive our resurrection body, our newness of life, our salvation, before baptism, but that is not at all what we find in the scriptures. Obviously, Jesus was raised AFTER He died and was buried. Likewise, if we want to walk in newness of life, then we must first die and be buried, and we do that by baptism.

Let us ask you a question- do you bury a man alive or do you bury him when he is dead? When he is dead, right? It is the same with baptism. We are buried with Christ in baptism, which should tell us that we are dead spiritually before being baptized. It isn't until after we are raised that we receive newness of life. Isn't that so clear? How can we escape that?

Another important point to consider is that we contact the blood of Christ at the point of baptism. How can we say this? Because Jesus shed His blood at His death, and it says here that we are baptized into His death. And just as the blood provides us with remission of sins, according to Matthew 26:28, so does baptism as seen in Acts 2:38. When you put all of this evidence together, it should become obvious that baptism and the blood of Christ are closely related.

Notice also in verse 6 that our old man is crucified with Him and also that the body of sin is destroyed. If we destroy the body of sin in baptism, then how can we be saved without it? Also, when we are raised from baptism, we are freed from sin according to verse 7.

How is it that so many religious people can believe and teach that baptism is unessential to salvation, especially after considering such a powerful passage? How can they teach the sinner's prayer when it is not even found in the scriptures, and then deny baptism? Is it possible to consider this passage and *logically* come to any other conclusion than the one we have come to here?

Finally, consider verse 17 of the same chapter, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” Clearly, obedience in the form of baptism results in our being delivered from sin and being made servants of God.

## Lesson Eight- 1 Corinthians 12:13

It might be easy to overlook 1 Corinthians 12:13 while proving the necessity of baptism, but it truly is an excellent passage to consider. Paul says here, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” We must first of all define what the “body” is, and then we will show the many benefits that exist in the body.

The body is shown in many places to be the church. Paul says so in Ephesians 1:22-23, “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” Also in Colossians 1:18, “And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” The body of Christ is the church, and as we can plainly see, reconciliation takes place IN the body. How do we get into the body? According to 1 Corinthians 12:13, we gain access to the body not by faith alone or by the sinner’s prayer, but by water baptism.

Consider also Acts 2:47. After 3,000 people repent and are baptized, it says in verse 47, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Can you see the parallel between Acts 2:47 and 1 Corinthians 12:13? One says that the Lord adds us to the church when we are saved, and the other says that we are baptized into the body (church) where we receive reconciliation. The two verses cannot be separated, and they perfectly describe the process of salvation- man must submit to God’s command (we have a role) and God must add us to His church (God’s role).

Now some people want to argue that Paul is speaking of “spiritual baptism” in this specific verse, because it says “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” We are not denying that the Spirit of God plays a role in our conversion. Again, the water does not possess any saving power. As we will see in Colossians 2:12, when we submit to the ordinance of baptism, we are putting ourselves in contact with the operation of God where He does the real work in removing our sin. But to say that this is spiritual baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is missing the point entirely.

As you begin to study and understand the significance of the church, it will become more and more obvious to you that baptism is absolutely essential, for we cannot be saved outside of the church. Can you find any examples of faith alone or prayer putting one into the body of Christ?

## Lesson Nine- Galatians 3:26-27

We should be able to stop here in our series of articles, but some people might not yet be convinced, so we press on with three passages left to consider, beginning with Galatians 3:26-27. Paul here says, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Now to some, this might appear to be almost contradictory, for Paul says in one verse that we are the children of God by faith, and then in the next verse, he says that we put on Christ in baptism. There is, however, no contradiction. Look closely at the structure of the passage. In verse 26, the apostle speaks in present tense- we ARE the children of God by faith. But in verse 27, he speaks in past tense- FOR (because) we put on Christ in baptism. The conclusion is simple- baptism puts us into Christ where we can be the children of God by faith.

Either way, you still have Paul saying that we put on Christ in baptism. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are told, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” When you put this passage together with the many others that show the blessings that we have in Christ, it should be very clear that baptism saves us, for it puts us into Christ. Ask yourself the question- can we be saved if we do not have Christ?

Again, please understand that we are not trying to elevate baptism above faith or the grace of God. Baptism is no more important than faith...nor is it any less important. We must consider all that the Bible teaches about the subject of salvation, and we cannot lift one verse out of its context above everything else and say “faith only,” or, “baptism only.” If the Bible says that we must believe in order to be saved, then we must believe. If the Bible says that we must be baptized in order to be saved, in order to put on Christ, then we must be baptized. We are not saved by any one thing by itself, nor can we leave any part of the plan out. If a person does not follow the plan of salvation, then they are not saved- no matter how good they feel (Matthew 7:21-23).

## Lesson Ten- Colossians 2:11-12

While some people pervert the meaning of this text, it actually presents a very powerful message concerning baptism. Many of the lessons here relate heavily to things that are said in other passages, but at the same time, the language used by Paul here is unique. It says, “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

First of all, it is necessary that we understand circumcision, as this is the point of the text that many people misunderstand and pervert. They will turn to Romans 4:11 to show that we are sealed as righteous by faith alone prior to baptism, just as Abraham was sealed as righteous by faith alone prior to circumcision. Paul says in Romans 4:11, “And he (Abraham) received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” This is one of the most twisted verses in the New Testament. The point is not that Abraham wasn’t required to be circumcised and that he was justified by faith alone. Abraham was 99 years old when God commanded him to be circumcised, so up to that point, he was not justified or made righteous by it! And so when God gave him the command to circumcise himself and every male in his house, he did it by faith, just as he had lived by faith all his life. That is the simple point of the text. But let us ask this question- what if Abraham had refused to be circumcised? Would he still have been listed as a man of faith in Hebrews 11? Would he still have been pleasing to the Lord? No. When God instituted circumcision, it became a requirement, as seen in Genesis 17:14, “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that *soul* shall be cut off from his people; he that broken my covenant.”

Understand also that when a comparison is made between an Old Testament thing or event and a New Testament command, that we cannot relate every single point about those two things. For example, circumcision was supposed to be given to male babies when they were eight days old, but baptism is not given to babies or even infants, nor is it limited to males. Other differences could certainly be mentioned. What we have to do is ask ourselves, “Why is God making the comparison between circumcision and baptism here?” The answer is clear- because each act involves an operation- one is physical and the other, spiritual. That is the entire point of verse 12, that we contact the “operation of God” through baptism. In physical circumcision, there was a cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin, but in spiritual circumcision (baptism), there is a cutting away of the “body of the sins.” This goes back to Romans 6:3-5, where Paul said that we destroy the body of sin in baptism.

With these things in mind, is it not obvious that baptism is essential? How can we possibly contact the operation of God where our sins are removed unless we are baptized? This tells us that in order to have our sins removed, in order to be cleansed and saved, we must be baptized. It is the same with a surgical operation for brain cancer- in order for the tumor to be removed, there must first be an operation.

This verse also shows just how active God is when we are baptized. He is performing the operation and removing our sins, not the water. People try to act as if baptism is entirely a work of man and that we are somehow earning salvation through baptism, but that is not at all the case, as seen here in this text. We are simply placing ourselves on God’s operating table.

## Lesson Eleven- 1 Peter 3:21

If you thought that Mark 16:16 was straightforward as to the necessity of baptism, then wait until you read and examine 1 Peter 3:21. Here, the apostle 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.”

While the denominational world says, “Baptism does not save us,” Peter, a man inspired by God, says, “Baptism doth also now save us.” Who are we going to believe? The world or God? It really is that simple. Baptism saves us. Again, we are not saying baptism only, or that baptism is more important than faith or repentance, but it does save us along with these other things.

The point is made in verse 21 that this is not just a bath that washes the dirt off of our physical bodies. Rather, baptism is our answer to God. Also, if you take the parenthetical statement out of the verse, what you have is, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” How does baptism save us? By the resurrection of Christ. In other words, just as Jesus was raised from the dead to provide salvation to the world, so are we raised from the dead spiritually to walk in newness of life, as stated in Romans 6:3-5. Baptism cannot be separated from salvation!

Some might wonder what the term “like figure” refers to. Some translations may say, “antitype.” In order to understand this point, verse 20 must be examined, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls *were saved by water*.” In other words, just as Noah and his family were saved by water (in the sense that it raised up the ark), so too are we saved by water. In a literal sense? Of course not, for again, the water does not possess saving power. Rather, it is the means by which God commanded we be immersed.

The apostle Peter makes it very clear in this text that water baptism is a part of the plan of salvation. Who are we to argue against that? How can anyone come to this verse and then say that baptism is unessential? Can you say that? What do you think?

## Lesson Twelve- Conversion Accounts

While we have considered many of the passages that directly deal with the necessity of baptism, it is also important that we examine a few of the conversion accounts in the book of Acts. It is interesting that you never find anyone praying the sinner's prayer or believing ONLY. What you find are people hearing the gospel, believing, repenting of their sins, confessing the Lord Jesus and being immersed in water to wash away their sins, unto salvation. There are two conversion accounts that we will consider in this article.

In Acts 8:30-39, the Holy Spirit tells Philip to overtake a chariot in which a eunuch of Ethiopia is studying from Isaiah. It appears that this man was a Jewish proselyte, for he had traveled to Jerusalem to worship. Philip asks the Eunuch in verse 30, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" After the Eunuch points out the passage that he is struggling with (a messianic passage), it says in verse 35, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Notice the Eunuch's response to the gospel message in verse 36, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" It is inferred that in preaching Jesus, Philip must have mentioned baptism. But Philip understood that there was more to the plan of salvation than just baptism. He replies in verse 37, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." This fits perfectly the words of Jesus in Mark 16:16, that we must believe and be baptized to be saved. What we find in verse 37 is that both faith and confession of that faith are necessary in order to be saved. Once the confession was made, Philip baptized the eunuch, and it says in verse 39 that he "went on his way rejoicing."

Another great conversion account to consider is found in Acts 9. Here we find a man named Saul (later the apostle Paul) traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus so that he might persecute Christians. But as he journeys to the city, Jesus appears to him and Saul humbly responds, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus responds in verse 6, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Now some people want to say that Saul was converted here on the road, but we can clearly see that he still needs to do something (in addition to the fact that he is struck blind and does not eat or drink for three days; talk about miserable!). Jesus sends a man named Ananias to Saul and it says in verse 18, "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." It does not say that Saul prayed the sinner's prayer, or even that he believed (it is inferred that he did, but if he was saved by faith alone, don't you think that it would have at least been mentioned?). What we are told is that he was baptized. In Acts 22:16, as Paul recounts his conversion, we are told exactly what Ananias told Paul, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Several points can be made here. First of all, baptism is urgent, and we should not wait two-three weeks to be baptized. We can also see that baptism washes away our sins (this fits other passages such as Romans 6:3-5 and Acts 2:38).

One final point to make in Acts 22:16 that we need to understand is the concept of "calling on the name of the Lord." We find this phrase two other times in the New Testament, in Acts 2:21 and in Romans 10:13 where Paul says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Most denominational people will use this verse to prove the sinner's prayer, but we must recognize that prayer is not even under consideration here. According to Acts 22:16, we call on the name of the Lord through baptism, where our sins are washed away, and in Acts 2, we find people repenting and being baptized unto salvation- all pointing to baptism, a humble response to God.

While other conversion accounts could be considered, these two seem to adequately prove the necessity of baptism. In every conversion account, you find people being baptized, but you never find anyone praying the sinner's prayer or believing only.

## Lesson Thirteen- Rebaptism, Acts 19

Now that we have firmly established the necessity of baptism and its role in the plan of salvation, let us address another issue that always comes up- rebaptism. We have to understand that there is a right way to be baptized, that it's more than just getting wet. Baptism as it is practiced in the denominational world is not the kind of baptism that God desires, as we will see.

This goes back to the point made earlier that the water has no saving power. If the water DID have saving power, then our reason for being baptized wouldn't matter, because the water would automatically save us. We could baptize infants and babies if the water had saving power and we could force people into the baptistry just to put them into contact with the water. If someone was in a coma, we could baptize them and they would automatically be saved. But we cannot do these things because the salvation is not in the water itself, but in the act of obeying God's command.

First of all, what does Bible baptism involve? By necessity, it is an immersion. The very word "baptism" comes from the Greek word "baptizo" meaning "to dip; to plunge; to submerge." Neither sprinkling or pouring fit this definition of baptism, nor do you find these types of "baptisms" in the New Testament. (To further establish that baptism is immersion, consider Jn 3:23, Acts 8:38-39 and Rom 6:4.) We also find that baptism is done "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19), signifying authority. Finally, baptism is FOR the remission of sins, as seen in Acts 2:38. Peter didn't command the people to be baptized as an "outward sign of an inward grace", nor did Ananias say that to Saul in Acts 22:16. When you examine all of the passages that pertain to baptism, they all point to baptism being unto salvation. If a person is baptized "as an outward sign of an inward grace," then who are they obeying- God or man? Certainly not God. And so once again, unless the water has saving power, then we must be immersed for the purpose of washing away our sins. Denominational baptism does not fit what the Bible says, and if a person has been baptized in the usual denominational way, then they must be "rebaptized," or really, to be more accurate, they must be baptized correctly.

We are provided with an example of rebaptism in Acts 19:1-7. This example proves several things- one, that we can be baptized the wrong way; two, that we need to be rebaptized if we were not baptized correctly. Let us examine the text, beginning in verse 3, "And he (Paul) said unto them, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' And they said, 'Unto John's baptism.' Then said Paul, 'John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after Him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." These men had received the wrong baptism, and therefore had to be baptized again by the authority of Christ. This tells us that if a person is baptized the wrong way, then they, just like the Ephesians, must be baptized correctly.

Let us say that a person is baptized in the Baptist denomination. What has happened? They likely said the sinner's prayer and thought that they were saved. Then they told their "pastor" and he scheduled them to be baptized in one or two weeks, or perhaps even at the end of the month. The day finally comes, and the person is standing in the baptistry when their "pastor" asks the congregation, "Do you accept this young man/woman into the church here?" Of course there will be a resounding "amen," but what they have done is taken a vote on you (set forth in Baptist doctrine). Then you are baptized "as an outward sign of an inward grace" into the Baptist denomination (as opposed to being baptized into the universal church/kingdom, as seen in 1 Cor 12:13). Ask yourself this question- did this person obey God's command to be baptized for the remission of sins? Were they baptized correctly? Is this what we find in the Bible? Would not the example in Acts 19:1-7 apply here? Of course it would.

Have you been baptized correctly?

## Lesson Fourteen- “What About...?”

Before we conclude our series of lessons, it is important that we address a few of the common “what abouts” that usually spring up after discussing this subject. We want to cover as many bases as possible in this series so that you can leave KNOWING that baptism is a part of the plan of salvation. If a question that you have is not covered here, then please contact us and we will do the best that we can to assist you.

The first thing that most denominational people say after discussing the necessity of baptism is, “What about the thief on the cross?” After all, he wasn’t baptized, but Jesus told him in Luke 23:43, “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” First of all, how do you know that the thief was not baptized? Can you say confidently that he had never before been baptized as a result of the teaching of John or even Jesus? But let’s assume that he hadn’t been baptized- he didn’t have to be. Why? Because the New Testament (where baptism is essential) was not set in order until the death of Christ (Col 2:14-16; Heb 9:16). Jesus was still alive when He pardoned the thief and promised him paradise, and as we see in Matthew 9:6, Jesus had the power, while on earth, to forgive sins. Finally, how could the thief be baptized according to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ if Jesus had not died, been buried, or resurrected yet? The point is- the thief did not have to be baptized the way we do today, and he couldn’t have been. He was still living under the Old Testament, and Jesus clearly had the authority to forgive him. This argument falls short in so many ways. All that is required is good, honest Bible study.

Others might say, “What about 1 Corinthians 1:17 where Paul says, “For Christ sent me NOT to baptize, but to preach the gospel?” While this may instill some questions in the minds of many, when we closely examine what Paul is saying, we find that he is in no way denying baptism. After all, as seen earlier in the passage, he baptized several of the people in Corinth. Why would he baptize anyone if he was not sent to baptize? So what is the point of verse 17? It is simply that our primary concern is NOT baptizing everyone that we meet. Instead, we focus our attention on preaching the gospel of Christ, and it is the responsibility of those listening to respond to the gospel by being baptized. After all, what comes first- hearing the gospel or baptism? And why would Paul “deny the necessity of baptism” in 1:17, and then promote the necessity of baptism in 12:13?

While we have addressed this point many times throughout the series, still someone will say, “What about grace? What about faith?” Again, we are not denying grace OR faith, nor are we saying that salvation can be earned. Baptism only will save no one, just as faith only will save no one. We can’t take one part of the plan and elevate it above everything else and say “\_\_\_\_\_ only.” If the Bible, which is God-breathed, says that we must be baptized, then who are we to argue against that. God has bestowed His grace and mercy upon us, and the blood of Christ is there to cleanse us, but we must respond to the call of the gospel in faith, by repenting of our sins, confessing the Lord Jesus, and being baptized to have our sins washed away.

Several other “what abouts” have been addressed already in this series, and we hope that most of the common arguments and questions have been answered. We have hopefully established that baptism is a PART of the plan of salvation.

## Lesson Fifteen- Conclusion

Being a Christian is more than just feeling saved, as seen in Matthew 7:21-23. The point is made in Proverbs 16:25, “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” A person may feel saved, and they may feel that what they are doing and preaching is right, but they could very well be lost. There are a lot of religious people in the world today who have never truly been converted, and while we may be inclined to say that they are alright, that God would never reject such good-hearted people, we must recognize that if a person is not in Christ, then they are not saved.

There is only one plan of salvation, and that plan includes water baptism. No where in the New Testament do we find the sinner’s prayer, nor do we find that faith ALONE will save anyone (James 2:24). If the sinner’s prayer is not in the Bible, then despite what man says and believes, it will never save us. And so where does that leave the thousands, if not millions of people who have “prayed for salvation?” It leaves them still lost in their sins. Until a person follows the New Testament plan and is immersed in water to have their sins washed away, they will be lost. Do we take pleasure in saying that? Of course not. But that is what the Bible teaches, and the Bible, NOT our emotions, has been established as the one standard by which we will be judged (Jn 12:48).

Some people will read all of these articles, and they will stubbornly maintain that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. They will ignore all of the passages that have been considered here and hold on to one passage or one point that they believe denies baptism. What we have to recognize is that the Bible does NOT contradict itself. After all, it is authored by God (2 Tim 3:16-17; Gal 1:11-12; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Rather than rejecting dozens of verses simply because they don’t agree with what we’ve always been taught, we need to harmonize the scriptures; and that may involve reconsidering certain passages and points that you have always felt denied baptism.

We have proven in this fifteen-lesson series that baptism is a part of the plan of salvation. The arguments commonly used to deny baptism have been denied, and we considered several passages and conversion accounts which prove the necessity of baptism. It is not *just* a “good thing.” It is essential! Go back and examine these many passages, and if you come to any other conclusion, we want to hear from you.

Friend, are you a Christian? Have you been truly converted and placed in the body of Christ? Can you honestly say that you have been baptized for the remission of your sins? If so, then who taught it to you? The denominations of today don’t teach it! Is it possible for a person to be saved in a denomination according to the New Testament plan of salvation when that plan is not even taught, and is actually denied...and when a *different* plan is taught? Maybe you were baptized, but it was an “outward sign of an inward grace,” to show the world that you were “already saved” by faith alone. That is not biblical baptism, and you now need to be baptized correctly for the right reason, according to Acts 19:1-7. If you recognize that you need to be baptized into Christ, as seen in Galatians 3:27, so that you can be raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-5), then please let us know and we will be more than willing to assist you in any way that we can.

Thank you so much for following along in this fifteen-lesson series. We hope that we have proved our point- that water baptism is a part of the plan of salvation. If you have any questions or disagreements, please contact us- we want to know what you think. And if you feel that we are sincerely wrong (which is possible, for we are fallible men), then understand that you have a responsibility to inform us, so that we might make correction and preach ONLY the truth.

May God bless you.