

Does Baptism Save Us?

(A Study of the Misunderstood Passages Dealing with Baptism)

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The Cause of Confusion

Those who use certain Bible passages to teach baptismal regeneration (salvation) violate the important hermeneutical principle known as “the analogy (similarity) of Scripture.” This principle states that no passage, when correctly interpreted, will teach something contradictory to the rest of Scripture. Confusion is created when certain obscure Scriptures are used to override the clear and unmistakable teachings of other Scriptures. When the overwhelming evidence of Scripture supports the truth that baptism does *not* save the burden of proof always rests on the shoulders of the person who tries to teach otherwise. **It must be understood that the interpreter of Scripture should always begin with the clear verses in the Bible and then interpret the less clear verses in light of the clear verses.**

This is a very important hermeneutical principle of Bible interpretation that must be remembered when seeking to understand the Scriptures, especially those Bible verses that seem to contradict the clear teaching of other passages. The cause of confusion concerning baptismal regeneration, or salvation through baptism, lies in the fault of the exegete, who fails to use proper hermeneutical skills when interpreting the Bible. Context, grammar, repetition, and agreement principle, or the comparison of Scripture with Scripture, will allow the student to ascertain the correct meaning of specific Bible passages.

The Bible is consistent with itself. The whole of Scripture unmistakably teaches that salvation is solely by grace (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 5:15; 2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 2:7-9; Eph. 1:7; Titus 2:11; Gal. 1:6; Heb. 2:9) through faith alone in Christ without water baptism (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:25; 6:47; Acts 16:31; 20:21; 24:24; Rom. 3:21–30; 4:5; 5:1; 10:9–10; Gal. 2:16; 3:26; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9; Col. 1:4). In fact, approximately 150 passages in the NT state that salvation is by faith

alone in Jesus Christ. One or two verses could never contradict this overwhelming testimony. Those obscure verses that seem to be teaching something else should never be construed as overriding the clear teaching of Scripture on the matter of salvation by grace through faith – without baptism. *There are no contradictions in the Bible.* Grace plus baptism, or faith in water baptism, becomes a contradiction, when they are linked together in the salvation experience. This is because grace can no longer be grace if baptism is necessary for salvation (Rom. 4:4; 11:6) and faith can no longer be faith in Christ alone for salvation if baptism becomes part of the expression of faith (Rom. 3:27-28).

The Clear Affirmations of Scripture

- A.** Baptism is not part of salvation (Acts 16:31; John 1:12, 3:15-16, 36, 5:24, 6:47; Romans 10:9; Eph. 2:8-9). This means baptism is not a sacrament through which the grace of God is transferred into your life. *A sacrament implies something that saves us.* Baptism is merely an ordinance of the church. No apparent contradictory verse could ever destroy this overwhelming evidence of truth. *Baptism is not necessary for salvation. It is necessary for obedience.

- B.** Baptism follows salvation (Acts 2:41, 8:35-38, 10:44-48, 16:14-15; 18:8, 12). This is important to understand. Since faith precedes salvation this would mean that faith and baptism should never be construed together. The analogy looks like this: faith – salvation – baptism. The two (faith and baptism) are not linked together to bring salvation into a person's life but are separated from the salvation experience. ***Baptism is not part of a person's response of faith in Christ but actually comes after faith has been placed in Christ.*** In other words, baptism occurs after a person has already responded to Christ through faith alone. To construe baptism with a person's faith is to bring great confusion of what it means to place faith alone in Christ for salvation.

- C.** Baptism is for those who are already believers (Acts 8:12-13, 36-37, 16:14-15, 18:8, 19:5).

- D.** There are dozens of New Testament passages where salvation is said to be by faith alone in Christ (John 1:12, 3:16, 36, 6:47; Acts 16:31; 20:21; Romans 10:9; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8). Let us always remember that the Bible is consistent with itself. No verse or two could ever contradict the plain and clear teaching of the Scriptures on this matter. There are no contradictions in the Bible. One should always interpret the Bible in the light of clearly revealed truth, which is easy and unmistakable to understand. All other obscure verses should be interpreted in light of the clear passages. Although there are those who teach that without the ritual of baptism no one will ever be saved, our salvation is not dependent upon baptism. It is dependent upon grace (Eph. 2:8-9).
- E.** The thief on the cross had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Luke 23:43). Likewise, Cornelius and his household, as well as Martha, all had the assurance of salvation apart from baptism (Acts 10:43-48; John 11:25-27).
- F.** The Savior is not stated to have baptized anyone, a strange omission if baptism is essential to salvation!
- G.** The apostle Paul was thankful that he baptized only a few of the Corinthians. This is a strange cause for thankfulness if baptism is to be an expression of our faith in Christ or if baptism has saving merit (I Cor. 1:14-17).
- H.** To include baptism as part of salvation would contradict the Gospel (I Cor. 15:3-4) and would make “another gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). There is no mention of baptism in the clear statement about the Gospel. The Gospel is what saves a person. The Gospel message is free from baptism (1 Cor. 1:17).
- I.** If baptism saves, then a man on his deathbed, taking his last few breaths of air, could not be saved.
- J.** When grace is mixed with baptism then grace is canceled out and law (works) becomes the way to attain salvation (Rom. 11:6 – “And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work”). Grace cancels out what man

does and what man does cancels out what grace wants to do which is to bring salvation into a person's life (Titus 3:5 – “not by works of righteousness which we have done”).

- K.** Baptism is an outward testimony of a believer's faith that he has already placed in Christ for salvation (Acts 2:41; 8:35-38, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 18:8, 19:5; I Cor. 1:12-17).
- L.** It's the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away our sins – not baptism (1 John 1:7).

John Philips remarks:

“Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ and our witness for Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:41). But it must not be made an essential for salvation; otherwise, none of the Old Testament saints was ever saved, nor was the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). In every age, there has been but one way of salvation—faith in God's promise—though the *outward evidence* of that faith has changed from age to age.”

The Careful Examination of the Disputed Passages

Mark 16:16

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

This is a favorite proof text used by Lutheran ministers and many others to teach salvation by baptism. But once again we must remember that God's Word never contradicts itself. Therefore, the meaning of this passage is something other than salvation through water baptism. What does it mean? The New Testament writers assumed that under normal circumstances every believer would be baptized to demonstrate their identification with Christianity and their desire to follow the Lord. It was expected in the early church that believers would be baptized.

Baptism in the early church was the outward declaration of conversion, so even though the ordinance had no saving merit, the

close connection to salvation is natural. This was because it was the sign of genuine faith and salvation. This is why there is so much emphasis on baptism. It's because baptism was the sign of a believer's identification with Christ and Christianity. The idea of an unbaptized Christian is foreign to early New Testament Christianity (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8). In the early church, converts were saved and then baptized without delay. So being baptized would immediately take place after one's salvation. Thus, the close connection between belief and baptism is made in this verse. *Faith and baptism were connected in a few Bible verses to demonstrate that baptism immediately followed faith and became the telling sign of a person's conversation to Christ.*

That belief is all that was needed for conversion is made clear by the second part of the verse ("he that believeth not" – Mark 16:16), the rest of the book of Acts (Acts 10:3), and many other texts of Scripture (Acts 16:31; John 3:16, 18; 5:25; 6:47; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 John 5:10). Therefore, baptism is simply used in connection with belief in the first part of the verse for the simple reason that it followed on the heels of a person's salvation and became the confirmation (confirming sign) of their faith and salvation in Christ. If a person believed on Christ and followed with believer's baptism it could be confirmed that they were saved ("shall be saved"). The salvation was not dependent on the baptism but the confirmation of their salvation was made by their baptism.

The sense of Mark 16:16 would be this: "He that **believeth** (*way of salvation*) and is **baptized** (*testimony of salvation*) **shall be saved**" (*a confirmation/evidence of one's salvation*). *That belief is all that is necessary for salvation is clearly seen in the second half of verse where no baptism is mentioned ("**believeth not ... shall be damned**" (missing salvation). Baptism is viewed as a *testimonial, evidence, and confirmation* of the believer's salvation which they already possessed ("**shall be saved**" – as a testimonial and confirmation of one's salvation).

Believing and being baptized showed a combination of an inward act of faith, which had already occurred in the heart, and the outward act of a public expression of faith, which complimented the belief. The two ideas of belief and baptism are linked together in this verse (Mark

16:16) by a single Greek article. With this in mind Jesus may simply be saying that the person who believes the Gospel message and who is baptized *following* his belief (note the order - “He that believeth and is baptized”) will demonstrate by his baptism that his faith was real or genuine and be outwardly confirmed as a saved man (“shall be saved”). **The expression “shall be saved” has to do with the confirmation of a person’s salvation following his belief and baptism.** In other words, the certainty of this person’s salvation will be manifested by the fruit of his baptism, so much so, that Jesus said, “he shall be saved,” not by the water baptism, but he shall be saved in the sense that he has proven himself to be a believer by his baptism. *In other words, we can be sure that a person who passes through the waters of baptism “shall be saved” (confirming that he is a Christian) because of his willingness to follow Christ.* Here baptism is not the means of salvation but the expected public confession that follows. **Jesus links baptism with belief in this passage to talk about the proof of a person’s salvation and not the actual means of cleansing for a person’s salvation.**

Jesus is not saying that a person is saved by his baptism; He is simply stating that they would express to others, through their outward act of water baptism, that they already possessed salvation. In essence, this person would be considered a saved individual because of his desire and obedience in following the Lord through baptism (“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”). In other words, this man “shall be saved” in the sense of giving proof that he is saved by his outward act of baptism. People will know that he is saved because of his desire to identify with Christ through baptism. **A person will be known to be saved and express his belief and salvation to others through his baptism.**

The opposite is true for the unsaved person. The unsaved individual who refuses to believe will not be saved (“but he that believeth not shall be damned”) and certainly this person would make no outward profession of salvation to others through baptism since he was never saved. He would NOT want to be identified with Christ and Christianity by way of baptism. This is why the second line of thought is dropped in the next part of the verse. The text does not say – “but he that believeth not *and is not baptized* shall be damned.” There is no reason to mention about the unbeliever’s baptism simply because

the person who does not believe on Christ in his heart, and who is not saved, will not want to manifest any outward token of his belief and desire to be identified with Christ through the waters of baptism. This person would have no desire to pass through the waters of baptism or manifest the fruit of salvation by passing through the baptismal waters.

The danger of identifying with Christianity through baptism was very real in the early days of Christianity. Only a person who was already saved would want to take the risk of identifying with Christianity through the baptismal waters. An unsaved person would not want to risk his life by being baptized and identifying with Christ and Christianity. 1 Cor. 15:29-30 says, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead (this speaks of Christians who are baptized following the example and legacy of the baptism of those who have previously died), if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead (following their example of baptism)? **And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?**"

Please note the risk of being identified with Christ through water baptism. It was a volatile situation to identify with Jesus Christ during the days of the early church. An unbeliever would never attempt to falsely identify with Christianity through baptism due to the persecution and tribulation that they might face. Therefore, they would fall away and disassociate from Christianity much like the person our Lord described in Matthew 13:21 – "Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

So the point Jesus was making in the Great Commission passage of Mark 16:15 was this. For the unbeliever the risk of baptism would be too great to take. Therefore, there would be no desire for an unsaved person to stick his neck out for Christ since he had not believed in Christ. This is why the text does not add the words – "but he that believeth not *and is not baptized* shall be damned." Please note again that this unsaved person "shall be damned" or sentenced to eternal judgment for his unbelief in Christ – not his failure to be baptized.

So the real emphasis on this verse is belief and not baptism. Baptism is mentioned by our Lord since it was part of the Great Commission

(Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19). Baptism became the outward sign or mark of early New Testament Christianity (Acts 2:41; 10:44-48) whereby believers identified themselves with Christ and demonstrated that they were a follower of Christ. A failure to be baptized would only demonstrate that they were not saved whereas those who followed in baptism would be saved or “shall be saved” in the sense of giving outward proof and confirmation of their salvation.

Let’s recap this verse. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” This means that a person will demonstrate that he is saved by his outward water baptism. The believer “shall be saved” in the sense of proving or confirming that his salvation is genuine. ***In essence, we can be sure that a person who passes through the waters of baptism “shall be saved” because of his willingness to risk his life in order to be identified with Christ and Christianity.*** The opposite is true of the unbeliever (“but he that believeth not shall be damned”). His unbelief in Christ is what damns him to hell but his failure to be baptized (note the exclusion of this point) identifying with Christ and Christianity will demonstrate that he has not believed. Thus, belief is what saves a person and baptism proves that his salvation was genuine, so much so, that Jesus said a person who is baptized “shall be saved” in the sense of proving or confirming his salvation. But those who fail to believe will give evidence that they are not saved by their refusal to be baptized. So baptism is not a *condition* of salvation, but an outward *proclamation* that the person has been saved. Jesus is not saying that baptism is necessary to salvation, but becomes a secondary confirmation or proof of a person’s salvation.

Note: Once again, the very last part of Mark 16:16 will tell us that belief is all that’s required for salvation. If baptism was required the text would say, “but he that believeth not and is not baptized should be damned.” The text does not say this. The basis for condemnation is unbelief, not the lack of any ritual observance. A superficial reading of Mark 16:15–16 would suggest that sinners must be baptized in order to be saved but this misinterpretation disappears when you note that the emphasis is on *believing*.

Remember that the Gentiles in Caesarea were baptized *after* they were saved (Acts 10:44–48). The New Testament Scriptures

repeatedly say that baptism followed salvation (8:35-38, 10:44-48, 18:8). Paul also thanked God that he baptized very few of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:14–16). This would be strange for Paul to say if baptism were essential for salvation. We've already stated that approximately 150 passages in the NT state that salvation is by faith alone in Christ without any mention of water baptism. One verse could never overturn and contradict this overwhelming testimony.

John 3:5

John 3:5

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

This verse has long been used to teach baptismal salvation. Many people see the word water and think that Christ is referring to baptism. Have you ever noticed that the word baptism is nowhere found in this passage? I would like to suggest that baptism would never have crossed the mind of Nicodemus. The Jews did not know of water baptism and Nicodemus was supposed to know what Christ was talking about from the Old Testament Scriptures – those Scriptures that were given to the Jews (vs. 10). If baptism were necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven then Old Testament saints would not qualify. Baptism only began with John the Baptist during Christ's ministry, but it was not practiced by the Jews before this time.

So Jesus in John 3:5 could not have been referring to Christian baptism because such did not exist at that time. Nicodemus should have known from the Old Testament Jewish Scriptures, to which Christ was pointing, that water was always used symbolically for spiritual cleansing (Ezekiel 36:25-26; Isaiah 44:3; 55:1). *The Old Testament reveals that when God does His saving work the result is the miracle of spiritual cleansing from sin coupled with new birth by the Holy Spirit.* First there is cleansing and then there is new life or birth. Water and Spirit are joined together in this passage to indicate how God cleanses the sinner from all his sins and then brings new life into our human spirit through the work of the Holy Spirit. The new birth is done by God, without human assistance, and when it takes

place in the human spirit (John 3:6), a person is born again or “born from above” (by God’s power).

The truth is this; the thought of water baptism never entered the mind of Nicodemus. However, Jesus wanted this man to reflect on the kind of water that does save - *the symbolic cleansing or forgiveness of sins that we receive from God*. When Jesus spoke of being “born of water and of the Spirit” He was referring to the cleansing (1 Cor. 6:11) that preceded regeneration and the saving work of the Holy Spirit that imparts new life (a new spiritual birth) within our human spirit, so that we can say, “We are born again.” In short, it’s this spiritual cleansing and new birth accomplished by the “Spirit” that brings a person into a right relationship with God. The waters of baptism have nothing to do with this passage or salvation. Nothing!

Acts 2:38

“Then Peter said unto them, 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.”

George Zeller writes about an experience that he had that was linked to Acts 2:38. He writes:

“This passage has become one of the favorite verses of those who teach baptismal regeneration. In a motel room there was a Gideon Bible and near the front it had a section with John 3:16 written out in many different languages. In this particular Bible someone had crossed out all of the John 3:16 verses and in big letters had written **ACTS 2:38**. The person who had defaced this Bible was communicating something like this: ‘You are deceived if you think that John 3:16 presents the true gospel. It doesn’t present the true gospel at all. It’s not enough to believe in Christ. To be saved and to be forgiven a person also needs to be baptized in water. The true gospel is much better presented in ACTS 2:38!’”

Sacramental View

A problem revolves around the command “be baptized” and its connection with the remainder of 2:38 – “for the remission of sins.”

There are several views. One view holds that both repentance and baptism results in remission of sins. This is the sacramental view. In this view baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins and salvation. Those who teach baptismal salvation or regeneration, which is a false teaching, claim that baptism is the way grace is conferred to a person and that baptism becomes the seal of a person's salvation. This verse is seen as a primary proof text for their view.

The problem with this interpretation is that elsewhere in Scripture the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 John 2:12), which results in salvation, is always based on faith alone (John 3:16, 36; Rom. 4:1-17; 11:6; Gal. 3:8-9; Eph. 1:7 with 13; 2:8-9; Mark 2:5; etc.). In addition, later in the book of Acts both Peter and Paul promise forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith alone (Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18). In fact, in Acts 2:41, several verses later, Luke verifies that a person must only hear the Word of the Gospel to be saved, and only after he hears the message and is saved, should he be baptized. **Acts 2:41 is a commentary on Acts 2:38.** Those who "gladly received" the Word of God (Acts 8:14; 11:1) were saved for it's the reception of the truth of the Gospel into the heart that saves a person (Rom. 10:10, 17; James 1:21; 1 Thess. 2:3; Matt. 13:23).

Following their reception of the truth (faith in the word) and Jesus Christ as personal Savior (John 1:12) the new converts automatically passed through the waters of baptism ("were baptized") to demonstrate their newfound faith in Christ and identification with the new movement of Christianity. Luke then records that three thousand souls were "added" to the church through the Spirit's baptism (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 11:24; 1 Cor. 12:13) which is a New Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit that joins a person to the living Christ and assures them of forgiveness (Col. 2:13 – "quicken together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses").

Spirit baptism is a saving ministry that the Holy Spirit accomplishes for a person when they express faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). This is what actually happened on Pentecost. Their reception of the word (faith in the word) is what added them to the church and this was then *followed* by their baptism as a testimony and sign of their newfound faith and salvation.

The baptismal salvation interpretation is not true to the immediate context, the entire book of Acts, or the whole of Scripture. Throughout the book of Acts the actual forgiveness of sin is linked to repentance - not baptism (see Acts 3:19; 5:31; 26:20). In addition, the Bible records that Simon was baptized without being saved proving that he only wanted to be identified with the power of the apostles and not Christ (see Acts 8:13; 21–23).

The point is this. ***People can be baptized and not saved!*** They can pass through water baptism for the wrong reasons and bypass God's grace and forgiveness, which is only found through faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Scripture repeatedly confirms that people are *immediately* saved without baptism (Luke 7:37–50; Matt. 9:2; Luke 18:13–14; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:13; Heb. 10:39 – “believe to the saving of the soul”). The story of the conversion of Cornelius and his friends clearly shows the relationship of baptism to salvation. It was only *after* they were saved, as shown by their reception the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46), that they were baptized (vv. 47–48). If baptism is essential for salvation, it seems strange that Peter said nothing about baptism in his other sermons (Acts 3:12–26; 5:29–32; 10:34–43). In fact, the people in the home of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit *before they were baptized* (Acts 10:44–48). **This passage (Acts 2:38), among many others, clearly shows that baptism follows salvation; it does not cause it.** The order is clear. Repentance is for forgiveness. Baptism follows that forgiveness; it does not cause it (see Acts 8:12, 34–39; 10:34–48; 16:31–33). Thus, the understanding of Acts 2:38 cannot be baptismal salvation.

Transitional View

A second option that has been used is the transitional interpretation. In understanding this passage we are told to remember that it was originally stated as a message to Israel in relationship to their national crime of murdering the Messiah. Thus, the forgiveness that came as a result of baptism was only meant for Israel during the transitional period of time in the book of Acts from kingdom truth to church truth. It was not the norm for the later epistles. The suggestion is also made that these Jews lived in a dispensational time warp and they were still clinging to the old era of Israel and the kingdom. During this special

time baptism had a specific application to the generation that crucified the Messiah. They needed to repent of crucifying the Messiah and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness for their sins as a nation and be restored to God. This was a special exception for the Jewish nation and is not to be taken as a mandate for succeeding generations in the church age.

Some even suggest that the Jewish people being referenced did not need to be saved, but only restored to a right relationship with God, through repentance and the appropriate sign of baptism. It's assumed that these people were believing Jews that needed to be baptized and separate themselves from the guilty nation or perverse generation that killed the Messiah (Acts 2:40). However, this assumption does not fit the scathing remarks of Peter in his sermon (Acts 2:23; 36) and the conviction of sin for murdering the Messiah (Acts 2:37). There is no warrant for believing that these people were saved Jews. Acts 2:41 clearly states that these people were unsaved Jews, who became saved, when they were added to the church.

There are various problems with this view. First, the idea that baptism was necessary for any group of people to be saved is foreign to the truth that is taught from Genesis to Revelation, the truth that salvation was always by grace (Rom. 4:1-9; Acts 15:11). This is a weak view because it attempts to pigeonhole two or three texts of Scriptures, within the book of Acts, to teach baptism for Jewish salvation, or a Jewish restoration to God. The view seeks to assign a strict Jewish meaning to this baptism instead of interpreting the Pentecostal scene, as a dispensational teaching under grace, which is related to water baptism for the church age.

Second, we must remember that Pentecost was no longer a John the Baptist baptism for the nation of Israel (Matt. 3) but a baptism that would be related to the new work of God or the "the promise of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:33) and the New Testament Church. Furthermore, we must remember that John's baptism did not save the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation under John's ministry was baptized as proof of their repentance and salvation (Matt. 3:8). Their faith in the coming Messiah or Lamb of God is what saved them (John 1:29). Third, we must also remember that the church began in Acts 2 and in

spite of its Jewish distinctiveness there were Gentile proselytes in the Jewish crowd (Acts 2:10).

Fourth, as mentioned above, to interpret the passage as a restoration of believing Jews to God, under the old order (law dispensation), with baptism being a sign of their restoration to God, suggests that these Jews did not need salvation. This certainly is not the case. Those who crucified the Messiah needed to repent over their sin and now embrace the Messiah as their Savior (see John 1:11-12). According to Acts 2:41 they were “added” to the church and saved. So the transitional argument of a special Jewish baptism does not do justice to the entire Biblical record on baptism and the new work of God (the Church) that had already begun.

Parenthetical View

A third option, interpretation, and understanding of this passage is that Peter was referring to an understood parenthetical (parenthesis or interval) connection between words. The Greek language makes a distinction between singular and plural verbs and nouns. The verb “repent” is plural and so is the pronoun “your” in the clause “so that your sins may be forgiven.” Therefore the verb “repent” must go with the purpose of “forgiveness of sins.”

On the other hand the imperative “be baptized” is singular, setting it off from the rest of the sentence. This grammatical construction would be understood in this way: “You repent for the remission of your sins, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” This grammatical understanding and interpretation fits with Peter’s proclamation in Acts 10:43 in which the same expression occurs (“shall receive remission of sins”). In this passage it is granted on the basis of faith alone. In Luke 24:47 and Acts 5:31 the same writer, Luke, indicates that repentance results in remission of sins. So Acts 2:38 is speaking about repenting to receive forgiveness of sins (plural) and then being baptized (singular) to express the genuine nature of your forgiveness and salvation (Matt. 3:11).

A fourth interpretive option of this passage translates Acts 2:38, “be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ on the basis of the remission of your sins.” The Greek preposition used here is *eis*

which may be rendered to mean “on account of,” “on the basis of,” “in view of,” or “because of.” It is translated this way in Matthew 3:11, 12:41, and Mark 1:4. In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptizer baptized “unto repentance” or because of the people’s repentance, which they already manifested in their hearts. He simply used baptism as an outward visible demonstration and expression that his followers already possessed a change of heart. Thus, John’s disciples were baptized “unto repentance” (eis) or because of the repentance they already possessed. The same would be true about the Acts 2:38 passage. The people were being baptized **because** of their forgiveness, which they had already received, and were now identifying with Christ and Christianity. Believers are baptized in view of God’s work of forgiveness, not in order to receive that forgiveness.

Charles Ryrie gives a summary of the Acts 2:38 passage when saying: “This does not mean in order that sins might be remitted, for everywhere in the New Testament sins are forgiven as a result of faith in Christ, not as a result of baptism. It means be baptized because of the remission of sins. The Greek preposition *eis* (“for”) has this meaning ‘because of’ not only here but also in such a passage as Matthew 12:41 where the meaning can only be ‘they repented because of [not in order to] the preaching of Jonah.’ Repentance brought the remission of sins for this Pentecostal crowd, and because of the remission of sins they were asked to be baptized.”

Along with this interpretation would be the *symbolic* understanding connected with the baptism ordinance. These people were being baptized because of their forgiveness. This means that God would naturally expect a new convert to portray the Christian outward picture or sign for forgiveness, which is water baptism. The baptism presupposes the forgiveness. God’s forgiveness in Christ gives baptism its significance. Baptism *pictures* that a person’s sins have already been forgiven because of Christ’s work on the Cross.

The sense would be like this: “**Repent**, and be **baptized** ... for the **remission of sins**” (Acts 2:38) *The Greek preposition “eis” means “on account” or “because of” (Matthew 12:41; Luke 11:32) indicating result – not attainment. Again, baptism was for the testimony, confirmation and picture of one’s salvation. The sense would be:

“Repent, (way of salvation) and be baptized for the remission of sins” (result of salvation). This means for the purpose of demonstrating, outwardly confirming, validating, giving testimonial evidence of one’s repentance, forgiveness, salvation and for providing a picture of one’s forgiveness (Eph. 5:26, Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Since these people were being baptized because of their already acquired forgiveness a special emphasis would naturally be placed upon the *ceremonial* meaning of their baptism, which illustrated their spiritual cleansing or washing away of sins (Acts 22:16). So it can be concluded that Acts 2:38 teaches how each saved believer would automatically be baptized **because** of the forgiveness of sins which they had already received through Christ. Furthermore, because they had just received forgiveness, it would be very appropriate for them to pass through the baptismal waters to portray the beautiful *picture* of how God washes away the sins of His people, who believe in Jesus Christ. Baptism is not only a public declaration that a person’s sins have been forgiven because of Christ’s work on the Cross but also a picture of this gracious work. Thus, there is a *picture concept* related to this baptismal verse. People were baptized immediately following their salvation to portray what God had already done for them. They were baptized because of their forgiveness.

Testimonial View

Another interpretive option, which is closely linked to the previous one, is that we understand Acts 2:38 in this same manner as Matthew 16:16, which conveyed the truth that baptism is an *outward testimony and confirmation or token* of a person’s salvation and forgiveness. Their baptism became a public declaration and confirmation of their salvation. Once again, the idea of an unbaptized Christian is foreign to the New Testament (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8). Therefore, baptism was a confirming sign and proof that a person had become a Christian. For this reason, baptism was linked to repentance. The two were linked together in order to confirm that a person had already come to faith in Christ and experienced the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38 says, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (for the purpose of demonstrating,

outwardly confirming, and verifying your forgiveness and salvation), and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Peter may be saying that the certainty of a person’s forgiveness will be outwardly manifested by the fruit of their obedience, which is first demonstrated by their act of baptism. In other words, people would repent and then be baptized to prove the genuineness of their repentance and salvation experience (compare Matt. 3:8 – “fruits meet for repentance”). Just as the believer’s genuineness of salvation was outwardly proven and confirmed by their baptism (Mark 16:16), so their forgiveness is outwardly proven or confirmed by their desire and obedience to pass through water baptism (Acts 2:38). Thus, these people repented and were then baptized to demonstrate, not only the genuineness of their repentance, but also their actual forgiveness before God. The emphasis of baptism being linked with repentance means that baptism outwardly confirmed their repentance and forgiveness. **Baptism was “for the remission of sins” in the sense of validating a person’s repentance and forgiveness before God.** The baptism became a token or testimonial that they were genuinely saved.

When you see a poster “Wanted for Murder” it does not mean “Wanted in order to commit murder” but “Wanted because a murder has been committed.” Likewise, these people were being baptized because their salvation had already been transacted before God and completed. They were baptized “for” the simple reason that their salvation was complete. Now they needed to confirm this by expressing the outward token (baptism) and demonstration of their newfound faith. As we have already confirmed, the preposition “for” in Acts 2:38 can be translated “because of” and gives the sense that baptism followed their repentance and was an outward demonstration and proof of their genuine repentance and forgiveness. The people were baptized “for the remission of sins” or for the purpose of demonstrating, outwardly confirming, and verifying their forgiveness and salvation. It became an outward confirmation or token of their salvation.

J. Vernon McGee seems to suggest this interpretation: “Peter says to them, ‘Be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.’ This will be an evidence that you have trusted Him for the

remission of your sins - rather than bringing a sacrifice to be offered in the temple.” Peter links baptism with forgiveness in this passage to talk about the outward testimony and proof of a person's forgiveness before God and not the actual way a person receives forgiveness before God.

A person's forgiveness and salvation before God is outwardly demonstrated by their changed manner of living and overall obedience (John 15:2, 7; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 6:22). Passing through the waters of baptism is the first outward sign that genuine forgiveness and salvation has occurred in a person's life. Thus, the actual “remission of sins” resulted from their repentance as declared in other Scriptures (Acts 3:19; 5:31; 26:20; Luke 24:47) but the *proof* of their “remission of sins” was confirmed by their water baptism. In other words, a person would be baptized after he repents to demonstrate that he was already a forgiven and saved man who was willing to identify with Christianity and the cause of Christ. This means that a person's obedience in baptism would be proof that he had already received the remission of sins. “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (for the purpose of confirming your forgiveness and salvation).

Let's look at this verse one more time.

“... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”

The mention of both baptism and repentance in the same verse does not mean that both are necessary for the forgiveness of sins. I might say, “Take your keys and coat and start the car,” but that does not mean that taking your coat is necessary to starting the car, even though it is mentioned along with taking the keys. In a similar way, we must view repentance as the sole requirement for salvation, even though baptism follows on the heels of our repentance, as a token and testimony of our forgiveness in God's sight. The wording “for the remission of sins” expresses the *confirmation* of a person's forgiveness following their repentance and baptism. When a person truly repented they would be baptized “for the remission of sins” or for the outward demonstration and confirmation that their sins were forgiven in God's sight.

Forgive me for being redundant. There was no such thing as an early church member refusing baptism. For this reason a person's baptism also was an outward testimony of their repentance. *This is another reason why repentance and baptism were mentioned side by side in the same verse.* True repentance resulted in the outward ordinance of baptism. However, repentance and baptism are not to be taken as dual conditions for salvation. This is clearly evident from the context where a person's response (faith and repentance) to the truth of God's Word was all that was required to bring salvation into their life. The exact description of those who responded to Peter is given in Acts 2:41: "Then they that gladly received his word" (by faith and a repentant heart toward the truth) "were baptized" (their outward confirmation) to demonstrate their newfound faith and salvation in Christ.

The text does not say that the people "received His word and were baptized" as though baptism was a prerequisite to a person being added to the New Testament Church. Their repentance and faith, or their response to God for salvation, is indicated by their response to the truth (Rom. 10:17), and this is what brought them into the blessing of the Church and salvation. Their response to the truth is set in contrast to their baptism. So we reiterate what was stated earlier. The people's reception of the word (faith in the word) is what added them to the Church and this was then *followed* by their baptism as an outward *testimony, sign, confirmation, and token* that a person's repentance was genuine and their forgiveness was already acquired before God. Baptism was "for the remission of sins" in the sense of validating a person's repentance and forgiveness before God.

Acts 22:16

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

This verse has long been used to promote baptismal salvation or that sins are washed away at the time of a person's baptism. I remember watching an old black and white Shirley Temple movie where Shirley, as a little girl, baptized a young boy. When the little fellow came up out of the water she triumphantly declared that his sins were now

washed away! The glitch in this interpretation lies in the fact that Paul was already a saved brother before he was baptized (see Acts 22:13 – “Brother Saul”). This means his baptism had nothing to do with his actual forgiveness and salvation before God. This is the fly in the ointment for all those who interpret this verse to mean that baptism washes away a person’s sin. Paul already had his sins washed away prior to his baptism! He was already a brother who was born again and going to Heaven (2 Pet. 3:15 – “our beloved brother Paul”).

Testimonial View

Now what does this text mean? One option is that the expression conveys the same truth that we have previously discussed concerning the testimony and confirmation of a person’s salvation and forgiveness. The washing away of sins at the time of Paul’s baptism was not the *means* of his forgiveness but the *demonstration* of his forgiveness. It became the proof that his sins were already washed away and the public declaration and visible token of his forgiveness. The expression “wash away thy sins” would once again suggest the *outward confirmation or token* of a person’s salvation and forgiveness.

As a brother, his sins were already washed away (1 John 1:7) and forgiven (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). However, Paul would now pass through the baptismal waters to outwardly demonstrate that his sins were washed away. His baptismal became a token and outward demonstration of his forgiveness. *Paul was washing away his sins in a testimonial way – not a saving way.* **Ananias was then saying, “Paul, give testimony to the fact that your sins are washed away. It’s time for you to be baptized so that you can give testimony of the great transaction of forgiveness that occurred on the road to Damascus.”** Paul’s cleansing and forgiveness was visibly demonstrated through the waters of baptism and his baptism became a token or demonstration of what had already occurred earlier. The expression “washing away thy sins” was the testimonial of a person’s salvation and often, at the time of a person’s baptism, they would confirm that Jesus was their Lord or Savior.

This is why Paul and others would practice “calling on the name of the Lord” at the time of their baptism. They would give testimony of a

finished transaction that had already occurred when they were saved. The two expressions “wash away thy sins” and “calling on the name of the Lord” should not be separated for at a convert’s baptism there was sufficient testimony given declaring that a person’s sins were already washed away or forgiven. The people were required to make a statement of faith before being baptized. The time of their baptism became a verbal testimony of an already acquired salvation and the confirmation of the genuineness of a person’s faith and forgiveness. Perhaps this was also true in Timothy’s life for the Bible talks about a time (perhaps his baptism or ordination) when Timothy “professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12).”

The point is this. An already saved “brother” like Paul would pass through the waters of baptism as a proof of his forgiveness and salvation in God’s sight. Ananias was saying to Paul, **“Brother Paul, it’s time for you to be baptized in order to give verbal testimony that your sins are washed away and outwardly prove and confirm to others that you are a forgiven man.”** Thus, a person would practice “calling on the name of the Lord” or give testimony at their baptism concerning how God had washed their sins away and already forgiven them. Ananias exhorts Paul to be baptized as a token of the washing away of his sins. This baptism would include calling upon the name of the Lord and giving testimony of his forgiveness at his baptism. Once again the *proof aspect* of a person’s salvation comes into play. Ananias used the expression “and wash away thy sins” in a testimonial way and confirming manner. Paul would give testimony to the fact of his forgiveness through his baptism.

Pictorial View

Another interpretive understanding of Acts 22:16, which is closely linked to the previous thought and very probable, is that Ananias is referring to the pictorial representation of baptism or what baptism pictorially represents – the washing away of sins (“wash away thy sins”). It seems clear that both baptism verses in Acts (2:38; 22:16) symbolically picture a person’s inner washing or cleansing from sin, which occurs at the time of salvation (Eph. 5:26, Titus 3:5). Baptism is a picture of God’s inner work of washing away sin (1 Cor. 6:11). Peter verifies that Jesus took the baptism of God’s judgment so that in

return we could be cleansed of our sins and have a clean conscience before God (1 Peter 3:21). Thus, baptism pictures a cleansed life.

This is a possible reason why the two concepts concerning the washing away of a person's sins and their baptism are sometimes linked together in the same verses. Acts 2:38 and 22:16 are teaching symbolically that the act of baptism represents the washing away of a believer's sins. In other words, when a believer is baptized they go through the waters to illustrate what has already occurred or taken place in their life – the forgiveness of sins. Water baptism is the representation (picture) of the real thing (salvation) or what Christ has already done for us. *Baptism is an outward demonstration of an inward work.* At the very moment we believed on Him for salvation, He washes all of our sins away (Col. 1:14; 2:13; Rev. 1:5). Baptism illustrates this glorious and wonderful truth of spiritual cleansing. *Paul was then washing away his sins in a pictorial sense – not a saving sense.*

Little Betsy had faithfully attended baptism classes. Her mother, wanting to be sure her daughter understood its significance, asked, "Honey, what does baptism mean?" "Well, it isn't the water that makes you clean," little Betsy said. "It's the soap that makes you clean."

So it is with the salvation analogy. It is not the baptism or water that makes us clean. It is the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:9) and the forgiveness we receive through grace (Col. 1:14) that makes us clean. Our baptism speaks figuratively (pictorially) of the inward spiritual cleansing experienced by those who have already received Christ's forgiveness. It seems that these two verses would speak to this end as well. Water baptism is a pictorial reminder of our inner spiritual cleansing.

Note: The baptism in these verses (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21) should be regarded as a witness of the **realities of salvation**, such as the forgiveness of sins, rather than the *means* of bringing them about. *Baptism is a symbol – not a sacrament.* Baptism is "salvation's symbol." It is not a sacrament whereby a person receives salvation. Furthermore, baptism in these texts can also be viewed as the **testimonial and token** of a person's salvation – not the way of their

salvation. Baptism is the **proof** of a person's salvation but not the **means** of their salvation. At the time of Paul's baptism he could "wash away his sins" in a *testimonial* way proving that he was already saved. He also washed away his sins in a *pictorial* way demonstrating the cleansing and washing that he had already received.

In summary, the three or four supposed passages, which are used to support salvation by baptism (Acts 22:16, 2:38, Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21), do not override the clear teaching of the whole of Scripture, which concludes that a person is saved and forgiven on the basis of belief alone without baptism (Acts 10:43). The disputed passages are actually teaching the confirmation or proof of a person's salvation (Mark 16:16) along with the symbolic or pictorial representation of baptism, which portrays a believer's cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and how each saved believer would automatically be baptized **because** of the forgiveness of sin, which they had already received through Christ. **At the time of their baptism (not salvation)**, as these passages stress, these people would confess Jesus as their true Messiah.

Their baptism was a testimonial concerning what had already occurred and proof of their salvation. In the same manner, their baptism was pictorial (by picture) in that it demonstrated what Christ had already done for them. Because of this, the two concepts of belief and baptism are harmoniously joined together in several verses of Scripture (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38 and 22:16). Not one of these verses mentioned above would contradict faith alone in Christ alone for salvation (Rom. 1:17). Rather, they actually explain the true significance of baptism, which is to confirm a person's salvation and pictorially convey the truth and testimony to others of God's great salvation that He has already granted to them through Christ.

Baptism was that which followed belief (Acts 2:41, 8:35-38, 9:18, 10:47-48, 16:15, 18:8, 19:5) to both confirm a person's salvation and pictorially demonstrate Christ's cleansing in the person's life. *The two, faith and baptism, compliment one another and are thus joined together in several Bible verses* (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16) to both confirm a person's salvation and pictorially demonstrate **at the time of a person's baptism (not salvation)** how Christ has completely washed all of their sins away through His death. The

ordinance and picture of baptism tells the never-ending story of Christ's complete forgiveness which He has freely bestowed on every believer. It sends forth a continuing witness of Christ's forgiveness to all who commit their faith to His death and resurrection for salvation.

Summary of the Water Texts in Acts

Baptism is linked with repentance and forgiveness in several verses for specific purposes. Baptism followed on the heels of repentance and salvation and had a three-fold purpose. First, baptism became the outward visible **sign** to confirm that a person's faith, repentance, and salvation was genuine (Mark 16:16). It was the outward proof that a person was already saved and forgiven. *Baptism was the confirmation of their salvation not the means or seal of their salvation.* Second, a believer's baptism was also a demonstration of their **surrender** to the cause of Christ and Christianity and this is yet another reason why they would "call on the name of the Lord" at the time of their baptism declaring His Lordship or mastery over their lives (Acts 22:16). Third, baptism was the **symbol** (symbolic representation) of a person's cleansing (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), which actually occurs when people repent and are saved. The emphasis and testimony of washing away sins would seem to illustrate this wonderful truth.

Once again, Paul was already a saved brother before he was baptized (Acts 22:13). This means his baptism had nothing to do with his actual salvation. Baptism was a picture of how Christ had already washed his sins away. Therefore, Christians would be baptized because of the forgiveness that they already possessed through repentance and faith. At the time of their baptism, which followed on the heels of their salvation, they would **confirm** that they are already believers identified with Christ, **confess** Christ to be their true Messiah and Lord ("calling on the name of the Lord" - Acts 22:16), and at the same time **clarify** the wonderful truth about the forgiveness of their sins.

I Peter 3:18-21

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but

quicken by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 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. 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.”

We do know that God’s judgment, which was poured upon Christ on the cross, was likened to a baptism (Matthew 20:22; Luke 12:50) and now Peter says that “Christ also hath once suffered for sins” (I Peter 3:18). Peter is going to use our water baptism as a figure or picture of Christ’s suffering on our behalf. It’s the picture of what our water baptism portrays that saves us – not our actual baptism.

The lesson of Noah’s day is given to teach us that Christ is the only way of escape from God’s judgment. He was the One who was actually baptized in the water of divine wrath and His death is likened to a baptism. All of our sins were placed upon Christ as He hung on the cross. This was a flood of divine judgment poured out on Christ even as there was a flood poured out on this old world. There on the cross, Christ became our ark of safety from judgment.

The water could only save them because they were shut into the ark of safety. The message is clear! The water of God’s judgment came upon Christ on the cross (our ark) so we could be saved through God’s judgment being placed upon His Son instead of upon ourselves. **It’s the ark in the water that saved them, not the water in the ark!** So Christ died on the cross of God’s judgment and it’s this that can and does save us today.

Note: “The like figure” (meaning by picture) – This relates back to what Peter started to talk about (“Christ also hath once suffered for sins”). This means that our water baptism looks back to the time when Christ (our ark) was judged for our sins (by God’s flood or baptism of divine judgment), so we could be cleansed from all of our sins. God’s flood (baptism) of judgment upon Christ (our ark) is what saves us. **We are saved, not by our own baptism, but by Christ’s baptism to death at Calvary.** This is what our baptism portrays. Baptism is a picture of what Christ has done for us. *Christ bore all of*

*our sins and has taken God's baptism of judgment upon Himself, so that He could cleanse us from our sins. **Baptism saves us pictorially or by picture.*** The picture or "like figure" of what baptism represents (Christ's judgment for our sins) is what actually saves us. **Baptism pictures our amazing salvation.** Coupled with His death is the truth of Christ's resurrection ("by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" – 1 Pet. 3:21). Peter could not forget to mention about the resurrection. There can be no salvation without Christ's resurrection. The baptism of Christ's suffering cannot save us if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-19).

Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3 & Acts 19:4

This group of verses is connected with the ministry of John the Baptizer. This baptism was actually a token and confirmation of their true repentant heart. It became a confirmation and sign of their genuine repentance and salvation.

Note: The Matthew 3:11 text does not read, "water unto salvation," but "water unto repentance."

The water baptism in John's ministry to the nation of Israel was to be a sign or token of their repentance. Their baptism was an outward expression of their repentance and faith in the coming Messiah and Savior, which John spoke about (John 1:29). *The baptism was not connected with the actual salvation of their soul but was the visible fruit or outward expression of their faith and repentance.*

In Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 it is evident that the Greek preposition ("eis-for") can be understood to mean "with reference to," "on the account of" "or on the basis of." This is an accurate translation and understanding of this preposition for it's clear that the baptism did not, nor could it, save the people.

Note: In Mark 1:5, the text does not say they came up out of the water "washing their sins away." The text says that they came up out of the water "confessing their sins." This would be a strange way to express forgiveness if they actually thought the water actually saved them!

It's very clear to see that this baptism was merely a visible witness or sign of their true repentant heart. Thus, the outward sign (baptism) was connected with their true repentance. Furthermore, the passage in Luke 3:3-7 will verify the fact that this baptism did not save them.

Luke 3:7-8

“Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

In verse seven a group of legalistic religious Jews came to John thinking that their link to Abraham and the nation's baptism could insure them of salvation. John said that wrath was coming to them even if they passed through the waters of baptism. What they needed to demonstrate was genuine, godly fruit (changes in living), as an indication of their true repentance. Being baptized to merely identify with a nation would not save them. They needed to truly repent over their sins in order to escape God's wrath.

John 3:5

John 3:5 cannot be referring to being born again by water baptism since Jesus did not institute baptism for the church at this point of time. The Jews as a people did not practice water baptism. Nicodemus would have understood the idea of “water” in relationship to the Old Testament teaching where water is repeatedly seen as a metaphor for God's cleansing (Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:25).

Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27

The mistakes that Lutherans and other baptismal regenerationists often make is to confuse the *real* baptism with the *ritual* baptism. The Bible teaches there is a baptism by the Holy Spirit that places every believer into a new spiritual position in Christ. This new spiritual location and position results in Christ supplying us with His salvation

(1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Tim. 2:10; 3:15) and a perfectly secure position before God (Rom. 8:38-39).

Romans 6:3-5

“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.”

1 Corinthians 12:13 declares:

“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.”

Galatians 3:27

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Please notice that in Romans 6:3-5 it does not say, “baptized into water.” In 1 Corinthians 12:13 it does not say, “baptized into water.” In Galatians 3:27 it does not say, “baptized into water.” These verses speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. The work of the Holy Spirit places the believing sinner in Christ so that the sinner can receive Christ’s spiritual cleansing, salvation, and security. Oh what a salvation!

George Zeller says this concerning those who teach baptismal salvation: “They assume that whenever the New Testament speaks of baptism that it means water baptism. However, this is not always the case as discussed above. The following passages refer to REAL BAPTISM (spiritual baptism or Spirit baptism) which happens to a person the moment he is saved. It involves being placed into Christ or into His body.”

Ephesians 4:5

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

Ephesians 4:5 speaks of the saving baptism of the Holy Spirit that brings a person into their new and eternal spiritual position before God. Water baptism is a picture of the real spiritual baptism that we receive as a result of the Spirit's saving work upon our lives.

Colossians 2:12

“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.”

Our spiritual link or tie with Jesus Christ comes through baptism, not water baptism, but the spiritual baptism that we receive through the work of the Holy Spirit (“the operation of God”), Who places us in Christ. This baptism results in our salvation and victory for daily living. Water baptism is a symbolic representation of the real baptism of the Holy Spirit. The picture should **never** be confused with the real thing. Our spiritual cleansing, the Spirit's baptizing ministry of salvation, and Christ's baptism of judgment on our behalf all in some reflect the meaning and message behind our water baptism. Let us not confuse the physical water with the spiritual salvation we receive from the Lord. This is a salvation that focuses on the saving work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. To place the sacrament of water baptism beside the true work of God is to confuse the message of God's grace and cause man to look at his meritorious work instead of God's saving work.

Transitional Baptism in the Book of Acts

Acts 19:1-6

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he 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. And

when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.”

A careful student of Scripture will remember that the book of Acts is a transition period between the Old and New Testaments. It's talking about a transitional period that can be viewed as a bridge. Certain events occurred on the bridge that could not occur when God's people get to the other side of the bridge. Such things as receiving the Spirit after people were saved, or the reception of the Holy Spirit at their time of baptism, or being rebaptized with the New Testament symbol of baptism in order to replace John the Baptist's baptism for the nation of Israel, could only occur on the bridge, when Old Testament saints were becoming New Testament saints (Acts 10:47; 19:1-6). Receiving the Spirit after salvation (Acts 1:8) could only occur in this unique time period, when the saints were passing from the Old Testament era into the New Testament era of time, or when Old Testament saints were becoming a New Testament saints. They were waiting for the historic arrival of the Spirit on Pentecost and the Spirit's initial arrival. These verses do not contradict the later epistles, which clearly reveal that all of God's people receive the Spirit at the time of salvation (Rom. 8:9).

Likewise, being rebaptized in view of identifying with the New Testament movement of Christianity and Jesus Christ, as opposed to the old Jewish baptism of John for the nation of Israel, was necessary in unique cases that took place on the bridge. These were unique *transition* verses that demonstrate how God was turning to the Gentiles to bless them in the new dispensation and the body of Christ (the Church).

Receiving the Spirit by the laying on of hands, at the time of their baptism, served as an official sign of God's welcome upon the Gentiles and Samaritan people into the new body of Christ – the Church. Likewise, the privilege to be “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” demonstrates that these people were crossing over the bridge from the Old Testament and John's baptism to the New Testament and Jesus' baptism. These were unique occurrences that could only occur on the bridge or crossover from Old Testament to New Testament Christianity.

In addition, miraculous sign gifts also occurred on the bridge, such as speaking in different languages, to prove to the Jewish people (1 Cor. 1:22) that God had turned to the Gentiles and would now bless them in special way instead of the Jewish nation. Now that the Holy Spirit has come and confirmed the new work of God, the sign gifts are no longer necessary, and they are said to have ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-18). The miraculous gifts were needed on the bride to prove the initial change in God's program from Jew to Gentile, but now on the other side of the bridge they are no longer needed. Miraculous gifts, receiving the Holy Spirit after salvation had occurred, and rebaptism are all unique events that could occur on the bridge that led from Old Testament Christianity to New Testament Christianity.

1 Corinthians 15:29

This verse has spawned considerable debate over the years. There are those who claim that this verse condones the teaching of "proxy baptism." This teaching, which the Mormon Church has adopted, suggests that committed Mormons can actually take the place of their ancestors who were not Mormons, and save their souls by being baptized in their place. Of course, the rite of baptism to this cultic group has saving merit. However, the Bible is not contradicting itself by teaching vicarious proxy baptism. No living or dead person can be saved by the ritual of water baptism.

The pronoun "they" in verse 29 no doubt refers to the new converts of Christianity. Paul was talking about those who were newly saved through Jesus Christ. Paul contrasts these young converts ("they") in verse 29 with the older converts ("we") who were already baptized - see vs.30. *The point is that these young believers, who were recently saved, needed to follow the Lord in believer's baptism, just as the previous generation of Christians did prior to their death.*

Note: When the Bible uses the word "for" (Greek – "huper") which as we've already seen can also be translated "on behalf of." This may actually give to us a better understanding of what is being suggested. Paul is simply saying that the newly saved converts were being baptized "on behalf of" the example or legacy of baptism, which the dead saints had left behind.

When Paul speaks of the dead (“for the dead”) he is not suggesting that these dead saints were never baptized during their lifetime. **Whoever said that these people were not baptized?** They actually were baptized while they were yet living, as all the saints were instructed to do during the early days of the church (Acts 2:41). The point Paul is making is that the newly saved and living converts, who were being baptized in their day, were actually being baptized “on behalf of” those baptized saints who had gone on before them and were now dead. This means that these young believers were in a sense taking the place of those deceased saints who already had set the example of baptism before them. They were *following in their footsteps* you might say. These young Christians were in one sense, following in the ranks of those saints who were baptized but now dead and gone. They were following the same Scriptural pattern of baptism, which all the saints followed before their own death.

In short, the living saints were actually being baptized “on behalf of” or “for the sake of” the previous legacy, testimony and example of those who had gone on before them. They were to keep the legacy alive and continue to follow their leaders or those who had gone before them. They could only do this by being baptized and *following in the footsteps* of their deceased brothers and sisters. Today, young converts must follow the example of baptism that the previous generations of saints have possessed. *We have a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) that have passed through the waters of baptism before us.* Even though they have died, they have stirred the waters and set the example and pattern for young believers to follow. Every time a young Christian passes through the waters of baptism, they are not saving their previous generation of ancestors who were already saved. *Rather the young converts were being baptized “on behalf of” or “for the sake of” the ongoing testimony of those believers and the former legacy of baptism, which these deceased believers have left behind.* They were following in their footsteps and keeping the baptismal legacy and testimony alive. There is no such thing as proxy baptism.

A Concise Conclusion

Does baptism save a person? The answer is a resounding no. How can water save a person? Water is always just one thing – water. It's the blood of Jesus Christ that saves a person.

Romans 5:9-10 says,

“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” 1 John 1:7 says that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

“For my pardon this I see
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Naught of good that I have done
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

O precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

John Philipps has said:

“Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ and our witness for Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:41). But it must not be made an essential for salvation; otherwise, none of the Old Testament saints was ever saved, nor was the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39–43). In every age, there has been but one way of salvation—faith in God's promise—though the *outward evidence* of that faith has changed from age to age.”

When the texts which supposedly teach baptism by salvation are carefully studied in their setting, context, Greek grammar, language, and the whole of Scripture, we can conclude that they are not

teaching baptism by salvation. They could not teach this or else they would upset the entire message of free grace and the way of salvation that is so clearly taught in other texts of the Bible. When a person concludes that these baptism texts are teaching salvation by water baptism they are simply committing the common error of eisegesis (reading something into the Biblical text that is not there) instead of practicing sound exegesis (taking out of the Biblical text) what is actually being conveyed.

Nehemiah 8:8 says,

“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.”

If this has been accomplished in this study the author will have fulfilled his purpose.

For a brief overview of baptism and the disputed texts regarding baptismal salvation see the chart: [“Belief, Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper.”](#)