

Doctrine of Baptism and Mark 16:16

1. While baptism is important, care must be taken not to embrace the idea that baptism is essential for salvation. Such a belief is called baptismal regeneration.
2. The Scriptures do not teach baptismal regeneration. Rather, every person is saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone.
 - *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*
3. In discussing the issue of baptismal regeneration, it is best to start with the plain teaching of the Bible before coming to a difficult text, for some, such as Mark 16:16.
4. The following verses state plainly, and simply, that if a person trusts in Jesus Christ, then that individual has everlasting life, is not condemned, and shall not come into condemnation. Such a person is saved.
 - *Luke 7:50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*
 - *John 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
 - *John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*
 - *John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*
 - *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; but is passed from death unto life.*
 - *John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*
 - *John 6:40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*
 - *John 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*
 - *John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*

- *John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*
 - *Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*
 - *Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.*
 - *Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*
 - *Acts 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*
 - *Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*
 - *Romans 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*
 - *Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*
 - *1 Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*
 - *Galatians 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*
 - *Galatians 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*
 - *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*
 - *1 John 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*
5. Unfortunately, there are selected texts, appealed to especially by the Church of Christ, and the Christian Church, to teach the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. One primary text is Mark 16:16.
- *Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

Special Note.

Believing is distinct from baptism, for the text says, “*He that believeth and is baptized.*” It is true that every person who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

It is not true that baptism completes the salvation of the soul.

What baptism does do is give an outward expression of an inward transaction.

Of course, it is good for a person to be baptized immediately when saved as in the case of the Philippian jailer who was baptized at midnight, and the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized immediately on the highway.

The Philippian jailer believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and he was saved. Because he was saved he was baptized.

Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Acts 16:33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

The Ethiopian was not baptized in order to get salvation, for we read that he asked Peter what might hinder him from being baptized. Peter said, “*Nothing, as long as you believe.*”

Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

6. Let the word go forth that a person should be baptized if, and only if, they believe in Christ in their heart.
 - *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.*

Special Note.

“I know that there are those who tell us that to be born of water means to be born of baptism. But no one ever received the new life by water baptism. You can search your Bible in vain for anything like that. It is not there. It is not in the Word of God.

Nowhere is baptism in Scripture likened to birth. It rather speaks of death. We are buried with Him by baptism into death. Water baptism is the picture of the burial of the old man, not a picture of a second birth.

Well, then, what is the water by which we are born again? Go through the Word of God. Nowhere do we find people being born of literal water. Trace “water” through John’s writings. You will find that it is the recognized symbol for the Word of God. David asked the question in Psalm 119:9,

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

And in the fourth chapter of John, Jesus, speaking to the woman of Samaria, said, *“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (4:14).*

What is the water that Jesus gives? It is the water of the Word. It is the testimony of the gospel.

“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25).

“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

What is the water of life? It is the gospel message. We read in Ephesians 5:25-27,

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

And Jesus says to His disciples, *“Now ye are clean through the word” (John 15:3).*

So we are to be born again by the Word of God, brought home to our hearts and consciences by the Holy Spirit.

Here are two men sitting side by side, as a preacher, proclaiming the gospel of God, perhaps quotes some such verse of Scripture as, *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15).*

One man pays no attention. The other man looks up and says, “What! He came to save sinners! I am a sinner. I will trust Him.” What led him to do that? The Holy Spirit using the Word as the means of his second birth. *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

The Lord makes it very clear that there is a great distinction between the flesh and Spirit. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* You can do anything you like with the flesh, but it does not turn it into spirit. If you baptize it, it is baptized flesh. If you make it religious, it is religious flesh.

Flesh remains flesh to the very end. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (Ironsides Commentaries).*

7. Another favorite proof text for those who believe in baptismal regeneration is Acts 2:38.

- *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.*

Special Note.

The word “for” is often interpreted to mean, “in order to get” the remission of sins. However, the Greek word “eis” can be properly translated “because of” or, “with reference to” the remission of sins.

Conservative Greek scholars note that had Peter wanted to convey the idea of being baptized in order to be saved he would have used the Greek preposition, “hina.”

But then again, even the English word “for” can be used as a proper translation if understood properly in light of the whole counsel of God.

Dr. John R. Rice notes that, “A man is paid for his work already done, not in order to get him to work. A woman is praised for her beauty, not in order to make her beautiful. A child is punished for his disobedience, not in order to get him to be disobedient.”

A man is put in jail for a crime, not “in order to” commit a crime. A man shouts for joy, not “in order to get” joy.

Matthew 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto (Greek, eis; because of) repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

Matthew 12:41 The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because (Greek, eis; because of) they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

Acts 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for (Greek, eis, because) he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

8. In addition to Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38, a third favorite proof text used by advocates of baptismal regeneration is Acts 22:16.

- *Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

Special Note.

The great question is this: “Does baptism wash away sins?” Dr. H. A. Ironside comments.

Do not link the expression “wash away thy sins” simply with baptism.

Even though baptism is a symbol, a picture of sin being washed away, no sin can literally be purged by water. Sin is only purged by the precious blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

But there is a sense in which, when Paul was baptized, his past was symbolically all washed away.

Saul of Tarsus had been a bitter hater of the name of the Lord Jesus, but when he was converted, all that disappeared. Saul of Tarsus arose and was baptized.

In the watery grave of baptism Saul of Tarsus came forth as Paul, not to be a persecutor, but a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God. The past was gone. Henceforth he walked in newness of life” (*Ironside Commentaries*).

The church has always taught that only God can forgive sins and only the blood of Christ can cleanse the soul from all sins.

“What can wash away my sin?
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
 What can make me whole again?
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus
 Oh! precious is the flow
 That makes me white as snow;
 No other fount I know,
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my cleansing this I see—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 For my pardon this my plea—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Nothing can my sin erase
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 Naught of works, 'tis all of grace—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

This is all my hope and peace—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 This is all my righteousness—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!”

9. A fourth proof text to advance the doctrine of baptismal regeneration is Titus 3:5.

- *Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

Special Note.

“The washing of regeneration is the application of the Word of God to the heart and conscience, thus producing through the Spirit’s power, the new nature. Having been thus washed from our old behavior, we are daily being renewed by the Holy Spirit, which God shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (*Ironsides Commentaries*).

10. The fifth passage which is said to teach baptismal regeneration is 1 Peter 3:21.

- *1 Peter 3:21 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:*

Special Note.

Peter uses baptism as a figure of speech in order to say that Noah and eight souls were saved by water. This does not mean that you and I, and every other believer, will be saved by water for water is a figure, a symbol, of salvation.

What saves a soul is faith in Christ represented by the ark. The only people who got wet in Noah’s day were those who were outside the ark, they were outside Christ.

Peter states plainly that baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh, a reference to the old sinful, carnal nature.

Baptism is simply “the answer of a good conscious toward God.” A person believes in Christ, knows that sins are forgiven, and so with a good conscious toward God is baptized.

11. The “*one baptism*” which is shared with every believer is found in Ephesians 4. The “*one baptism*” is the Spirit baptism whereby the believer is identified with the body of Christ.

- *Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

12. It is important to challenge and refute the teaching of baptismal regeneration for several reasons.

- The simplicity of the gospel is destroyed when the necessity of baptism for salvation is brought into the discussion. The thief on the cross was not baptized, and yet he went to be with Jesus that same day. *Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*
- Baptism is an act of work that, if depended upon, violates the Scriptural principle of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone. *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*
- Baptism for salvation is no different than someone believing in good works for salvation.. Salvation can never be a combination of grace, plus works. *Romans 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.*
- Wrong doctrine will lead to wrong practices, such as baptizing the infant and declaring that it is nothing more than a baby dedication. Not so. In many mainline denominations the purpose of baptizing a baby is for remission of sins. A Lutheran pastor once told me, "I believe that at baptism I was regenerated, and so salvation is mine to lose."
- Baptismal regeneration promotes a way of salvation that is different from how a person was saved in the Old Testament, or the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, a person was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as He was revealed in type through the Tabernacle, rituals, sacrifices of the saints, and the holy days. Everything spoke in shadow form of Jesus. Those who look for Christ in the manna, in the burnt offerings, in the Tabernacle, in the Law and in the prophets can find Him.

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

In the New Testament a person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as He is revealed as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. *John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

13. It is important to be baptized for several good reasons.

- Baptism is the known will of the Lord and pleases Him. *Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*
- Baptism is commanded. *Acts 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*
- Baptism is becoming. It makes a Christian attractive in the sight of God just as the Lord's baptism made Him look good. *Matthew 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*
- Baptism honors the trinity which is acknowledged in the act of gospel obedience. *Matthew 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*
- Baptism pictures the believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Buried with Him in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection, to walk with Christ forever more.