

Questions on Baptism¹

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Notes: After each question, the answer(s) which Darkness to Light ministry disagrees with are given first. Below each Scripture reference is how "the other side" interprets the verse. After the "BUT" is the reason this ministry disagrees with that interpretation. Then the answer this ministry would give to the question is given, followed by Scripture verses and interpretations thereof. In the parentheses following each answer is a sample of groups adhering to that position.

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

YES (Catholicism; Mormonism; Churches of Christ):

Matthew 3:13-15: Jesus was baptized, so it must be important.

BUT: Important yes, but this does not mean it is necessary for salvation; Jesus did not need to be saved!

Matthew 16:16: People who believe and are baptized are saved.

BUT: The textual difficulty of Mark 16:9-20 makes this passage a precarious proof-text. But accepting it as genuine, two kinds of people are mentioned, "He who believes and is baptized" and "he who does not believe." The third possibility, "He who believes but is not baptized" is not mentioned. So this passage proves nothing in this regard.

John 3:5: Jesus says people must be born of water and the Spirit.

BUT: Baptism is not actually mentioned. "Water" could be referring to many other things: the cleansing properties of the Word of God (John 15:3 Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 1:23); "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5; see also Ezekiel 36:25); suffering (Matthew 10:38, cp. Isa 43:1f, "water" in the Septuagint is singular).

Most likely, it refers to the waters of natural birth. Note the parallel between "born of water" with "born of the flesh" in the next verse (cp. John 1:12f). In any case, in John 3:6-8 only the Spirit is mentioned as being involved in regeneration.

Acts 2:38: Peter tells people to be baptized for the remission of sins.

BUT: The Greek word "for" can also mean "because of." The same word is used in Matthew 3:11 where people were baptized by John BECAUSE OF their repentance (see also Matthew 12:41 where "at" is again the same word).

Moreover, "repent" and "be baptized" in Acts 2:28 have different grammatical forms so they are not both linked with "the remission of sins." On the other hand, in Acts 3:19, the verbs "repent" and "be converted" do have the same grammatical forms. But baptism is not mentioned. So baptism is to be submitted to AFTER repentance and conversion.

Acts 22:16: Sins are "washed away" in baptism.

BUT: "calling" is a participle and can be taken in an instrumental sense; i.e. "wash away your sins BY calling on the name of the Lord" (cp. Acts 2:21).

Titus 3:5: "washing of regeneration" is a reference to baptism and is separate from the "renewing of the Holy Spirit."

BUT: The two are not necessarily separate. But even if they are, the text does not specifically equate "water of regeneration" with baptism. See on John 3:5 above for other possibilities of what this "water" could be referring to.

Hebrews 10:22: Our hearts are "sprinkled from an evil conscience."

BUT: Baptism is not specifically mentioned. The allusion is to a passage like Lev 16:14-17 where BLOOD, not water, was sprinkled on people. This ritual symbolized Christ's coming blood sacrifice that would cleanse sins (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18f).

1 Peter 3:21: Peter says baptism saves us.

BUT: He specifically says that what saves is "the answer of a good conscience towards God" (cp. Hebrews 9:14).

NO (Most Protestant denominations and churches):

John 3:16; 6:28,29; 20:31: By "believing" we can have life in Christ. No mention is made of baptism (cp. 1John 5:13).

Luke 23:39-43: The thief on the cross will be "in Paradise" with Jesus without having been baptized.

Acts 10:44-48: The Holy Spirit "fell upon" and was "poured out" on Cornelius and those with him and "received" by them; they "speak with tongues and magnify God" all BEFORE being baptized. So baptism cannot be necessary to receive the Holy Spirit (cp. Luke 11:13). And having the Spirit is the mark of being saved (Romans 8:9-11).

Romans 2:28,29; Gal 5:6; 6:13-15: Paul's words about circumcision in these verses could easily apply to baptism. Outward ceremonies do not change a person but the Spirit working in a person's heart.

Further, faith and love are what are important in the Christian life. Outward ceremonies "avail nothing." What matters is being "a new creation" in Christ Jesus (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Romans 4:11,12: Again, Paul's words about circumcision could easily apply to baptism. Abraham was saved BEFORE he was circumcised. Circumcision was only a "sign" of the righteousness he had previously received by faith (see Romans 4:3).

1 Corinthians 1:14-17: Paul declares, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." So he separates the Gospel from baptism. Also, baptism is so much of a concern to Paul that he can't even remember who he baptized!

¹ C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\15Cults&FalseReligions\Articles\Baptism1.doc

Ephesians 2:8-10: Baptism is a work, but we are saved by grace. However, being baptized is one of the "good works which God prepared beforehand" that we should engage in after being saved.

1 Peter 1:23: "the word of God" is the outward agent in our regeneration, not water.

Who Should Be Baptized?

Infants (Catholicism, Lutheranism, Reformed/ Presbyterian churches):

Acts 16:14-15, 31-33: "Households" are baptized which surely included children.

BUT: This is a big assumption. Infants and children are not mentioned.

Colossians 2:11,12: Baptism is equated with circumcision which was performed on infants. In the same way, infants should now be baptized.

BUT: The passage does not necessary connect baptism with circumcision. And besides, Paul is referring to both in a metaphorical sense ("made without hands" - cp. Romans 2:28f).

Believers only (Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Charismatics):

Acts 2:41; 8:12,35-38; 9:18; 10:44-48; 18:8; 19:1-7: In all of these cases people exercise faith in Christ before being baptized. Infants are incapable of trusting Christ.

Romans 6:3-6: How can infants rise to a "newness of life?" They have no old life needing crucified.

How Should a Person Be Baptized?

By sprinkling (Pedobaptist churches; i.e. churches that baptize infants. "pedo" comes from the Greek word for child.):

Matthew 3:11: People are baptized "with" water.

BUT: The Greek word can also mean "in."

Acts 2:41: Only by sprinkling could the twelve apostles baptize 3000 people in one day. Also, there is not sufficient water sources in Jerusalem to immerse 3000 people.

BUT: It was probably not only the twelve apostles but others from the 120 who had been praying in the upper room who helped in the baptizing (Acts 1:15; 2:10). 3000 divided by 120 equals only 25 baptisms each. And note, they started early in the day (Acts 2:15; "the third hour" would be 9:00 am).

As for the water, some could have traveled the 20 miles to the Jordan River by horse or camel-back. Others could have been baptized in closer streams, public and private baths, or other sources of water.

One way or another, the logistics could have been worked out. Remember the apostles had previously fed "about five thousand men, besides women and children" and gathered up the leftovers in one day. And then they did not start until "it was evening" (Matthew 14:14-21).

They later did the same for "four thousand men, besides women and children" (Matthew 15:38). So the disciples were not new to organizing large crowds on the spur of the moment.

Hebrews 10:22: "having our hearts sprinkled" is a reference to baptism.

BUT: Baptism isn't actually mentioned. And even if this verse is a reference to baptism, the second half of the verse adds "our bodies washed with pure water." It is difficult to wash an entire body by "sprinkling" it!

By pouring (Pedobaptist churches, most Mennonite churches):

Acts 2:17; Titus 3:5,6: Baptism should be by pouring to symbolize the reception of the Holy Spirit by the believer.

BUT: Baptism is not specifically mentioned in these verses. And see above on Titus 3:5.

By immersion (Baptists, Mennonite Brethren, Pentecostals, Charismatics):

Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38,39: They "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water."

Matthew 3:5-6; John 3:23: John baptized at the Jordan river because he needed "much water."

Matthew 3:11: The Greek word for "baptize" is used twice in the Septuagint and in both instances it means to immerse or dip (2 Kings 5:14; Isaiah 21:4). A related word is used three times with the same meaning (Leviticus 4:6; Numbers 19:18; Ruth 2:14).

Romans 6:3-6: Baptism is a symbolic representation of believers dying to their old lives, being buried with Christ, and rising to new lives in Christ. To symbolize "burial" requires immersion.

Should Believers Be Baptized for the Dead?

Yes (Mormonism):

1 Corinthians 15:29: Paul teaches that believers are to be baptized for the dead.

BUT: The context of this verse is Paul contending with people who deny the resurrection of the dead. Paul is saying that "they" baptize for the dead. The "they" are the heretics. In the next two verses Paul uses the words "we" and "I" thus separating himself and other believers from the "they."

Paul's purpose in citing the practice of the heretics is apologetical, not theological. He is showing that "they" are inconsistent to deny the resurrection of the dead and yet to be engaging in this practice. He is not teaching doctrine.

1 Peter 3:19, 4:6: The Gospel is preached to those who are dead. So we must be baptized for them so they can be saved.

BUT: The verses do not mention baptism. Furthermore, the conclusion makes two assumption, both questionable. First, it assumes baptism is necessary for salvation. But see above for arguments against this position.

Second, the conclusion assumes Peter is teaching there is a "second chance" for salvation after death. But there are other possible interpretations of these verses.

Peter could be referring to people who are NOW dead but who had heard the Gospel during their lifetimes (see the rendering of these verses in the *New International Version*).

Or in 3:8 "the spirits" could be "fallen angels" (not departed human beings). Christ would then be declaring His victory over them, not presenting the Gospel to them. And in 4:6 "the dead" could be "the spiritually dead" on the earth who had already heard the Gospel (cp. Ephesians 2:1, 5). The Greek word for "preached" in 3:8 is different from the one in 4:6. The former indicates only an "announcement" - the latter the proclamation of the Gospel (Edwin A. Blum "1 Peter" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981, pp.241-245).

No (Historic Christianity):

Luke 16:19-31; Hebrews 9:27: There is no "second chance" in the hereafter. Judgement occurs at death.

Note: All Scripture references from: *The New King James Version*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, unless otherwise indicated.