

# The Role of Baptism

The word salvation comes from the Greek word (*soteria*) which means deliverance (to rescue or set free). And so, the doctrine of salvation describes the distinction now made between ourselves and others because of God's plan.

- He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

Mark 16:16

We are the rescued, and we are those who are set free. For example, in the movie Titanic we saw that some of the passengers were lost and some were rescued. In the same way, the doctrine of salvation demonstrates a similar reality, some are saved and some are lost.

Salvation is the doctrine that embodies the entire process whereby through God's plan we become holy, innocent, perfect sons and daughters of God and avoid the terrible consequences of sin.

Salvation is short hand for many different doctrines. For example, the term "The Presidency" includes all the details, authority and duties of the President in one word. In the same way the doctrine of salvation includes the teaching on the creation, fall and reconciliation of man with all of the details contained in 10 sub-doctrines.

When we say that we are "saved" or we talk about our "salvation," we are saying in a single word everything I have said in this book. It is the final result of God's plan, looking at it from its completion point.

An important teaching that stems from this study is how the actions of baptism fit into the overall teachings of the major Christian doctrines.

## Baptism a Major Christian Doctrine

Many times we teach about baptism and we focus mainly on how to do it properly and that it should be performed immediately at belief.

After our study of major doctrines, we are better able to see where baptism fits into the overall picture and context of Christian teaching. After our study in doctrine we should better be able to understand the "what" of baptism (what it is) and the why of this action. In essence,

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baptism is the historical moment when we receive the benefits derived from God's plan.

Jesus' historical expression of love was made at the cross (John 3:16). We can pinpoint the day, date, hour of this event.

Our historical expression of faith is baptism (Mark 16:16), the expression of faith we make in response to God's offer of rescue and reconciliation.

In Ephesians 4:5, Paul says that there is only one baptism, and he taught this for two important reasons:

## 1. To distinguish Jesus' baptism from others

In Paul's day there were many types of baptisms being practiced: pagan admission rites, Jewish purification with water, the baptism of John the Baptist. Because of this Paul wanted to impress upon them that only one baptismal/water ritual now counted with God, and that was the immersion in water of repentant believers in relation to Christ and no other.

Someone might ask, "What about Holy Spirit baptism?" The Apostles received this at Pentecost. The sign for this was the tongues of fire that appeared over them (Acts 2:1-3). We receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at water baptism (Acts 2:38), and once we have experienced this, there is no other baptism left to administer.

## 2. To establish its importance

In every passage dealing with baptism, it is always associated with salvation. There was only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism and these three were tied to the salvation offered by God (we use salvation here in the sense that it is the summary of all things produced by God's reconciliation).

When we talk about baptism, we are talking about an interchangeable word that can be used for salvation. The word salvation includes everything concerning man's reconciliation. The word and action of

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baptism embodies all of these same things in actual historical fact and not just in religious theory. When a person is baptized, that person receives in actual fact, not just in theory:

- Christ's elect status as a chosen one of God, explained in the doctrine of election.
- They are subject to God's promise of salvation outlined in the doctrine of predestination.
- They receive payment for their personal sins as the doctrine of atonement explains.
- They are actually set free from the judgment and condemnation they were under as the doctrine of redemption explains.
- They begin to experience the new life given to them by God and detailed in the doctrine of regeneration.
- They actually can call on God as their Father and not before, as the doctrine of adoption says.
- These people are now truly and forever innocent and acceptable to God as the doctrine of justification says.
- Baptized people are now, in reality, considered perfect in God's eyes as the doctrine of perfection teaches.

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- These believers now live a new and different life with a new and different purpose as the doctrine of sanctification outlines.
- And finally, those who believe and are baptized can say with confidence, without pride or judgment, that they are the saved because that is what the doctrine of salvation teaches.

## One Baptism, Many Descriptions of Salvation

The Bible, therefore, teaches that there is only one baptism, that moment in time when an individual is immersed in water because of their faith in Christ as the Son of God and receives salvation and the blessings attached to salvation.

A problem that many have concerns the validity of their baptism and if they should do it over again. There is confusion here because we often fail to realize that in the New Testament the idea of salvation is expressed using different imagery and different terms.

We know that baptism and salvation are related to one another and we know how. The problem lies in the fact that when the Bible writers mentioned the idea of salvation, they did not always use the same words/images. Here are some examples of this phenomenon:

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## Salvation = Disciples

- <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
- <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”  
Matthew 28:18-20

## Salvation = Obedience

- He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.  
Mark 16:16

## Salvation = New birth

- Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.  
John 3:5

## Salvation = Forgiveness

- Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins;  
Acts 2:38a

## Salvation = Holy Spirit

- and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. - Acts 2:38b

## Salvation = Added to the church

- So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.  
Acts 2:41

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## Salvation = Burial and resurrection

- Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?  
Romans 6:3

## Salvation = Adoption

- For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.  
Galatians 3:26

## Salvation = Clothed with Christ

- For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.  
Galatians 3:27

## Salvation = Clear conscience

- <sup>20</sup> who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. <sup>21</sup> Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.
- I Peter 3:20-22

Note some important features of these 10 scripture references.

1. They all refer to salvation. This is the point that they are making. The passages talk about the issue of salvation in context, and I mean salvation from the doctrinal perspective that we have been discussing as the summary of all the previous doctrines.

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2. They each refer to salvation from a different perspective and use different imagery to describe it. To be obedient to God is the same as to be saved; to have a clear conscience before God is the same as being saved. In other words, only a saved person can be a disciple, obedient, born again, forgiven, filled with the Holy Spirit, a member of the church, resurrected with Christ, be a child of God, wear Christ and have a clear conscience. Only saved people have and experience these things!
3. Note that all of these salvation passages include baptism as the dynamic moment when these things take place. You cannot separate baptism from salvation. No matter how the writers referred to or described salvation, faith was always the constant element, and baptism its physical expression.



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Now if we understand this we can answer the four most asked questions that invariably arise when we speak about baptism.

## Most Asked Questions About Baptism

### 1. Is baptism necessary for salvation?

The answer is yes. Only saved people can claim to be obedient to the gospel, can claim to be disciples, can say that they are forgiven, filled with the Holy Spirit, members of the body, etc. Only saved people can claim to have these things and these things are given and come into effect at baptism. Previously, 10 scripture references were listed in order to prove this point.

### 2. Does the Bible not say we are saved by faith?

Yes, it does, but when it teaches this it is always in response to those who are trying to be saved by a system of law or culture. Salvation has always been by faith, not by perfect law-keeping or belonging to a specific culture (Romans 3:27-30). Faith, however, has always been expressed according to God's will in concrete ways, for example: Noah's faith expressed in building the ark; Moses' faith expressed in returning to Egypt to face Pharaoh; believers in Jesus expressed their faith in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).

In the New Testament the writers always contrasted faith versus law, not faith versus baptism. The writers understood that baptism was an act of faith that demonstrated the authenticity of their belief. A person who believed the gospel expressed that faith in repentance and baptism and was thus saved. This is what "obeying the gospel" actually means.

### 3. What about Romans 10:10-13?

- <sup>10</sup> for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord



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is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; <sup>13</sup> for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This passage is used by Evangelicals to prove that the “moment” of salvation is when one gives intellectual acceptance, when one thinks or decides to believe, this is the historical moment of salvation, not baptism. The reason they believe this is because they do not interpret this passage in its proper context. I could do the same thing with other passages. For example:

- <sup>46</sup> and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
- Luke 24:46-47

If this were the only passage I used, I could say that repentance was the point of salvation, not faith or baptism.

You have to see the passage in context, what does Romans 10:10-13 mean in context? Let us see what

Paul is talking about in Romans:

- Romans chapters 1-3 – All men are guilty of sin.
- Romans chapters 4-5 – God’s plan of salvation through reconciliation achieved by Christ.
- Romans chapters 6-8 – The response to God’s offer and the terms of this new life in Christ.
- Romans chapters 9-11 – Why the Jews did not believe.
- Romans chapters 12-16 – How to live as Christians in this world.

Romans 10:10-13 is a passage located in the section where Paul is explaining why the Jews, who had great spiritual advantages, failed to receive the promised salvation. Paul is comparing the Gentiles (who did not know God but accepted Jesus), to the Jews (who had the Law, the prophets and the promises but rejected Him). He says that the Jews

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rejected Jesus because, among other things, they tried to achieve righteousness through law keeping and ritualism, and thought they were succeeding (9:32-10:3).

He goes on to say that the Gentiles, on the other hand, pursued salvation through a system of faith in the Savior, His cross and their response to Him. At this point he quotes from the Old Testament to demonstrate that this idea of “salvation through a system of faith” was known in Old Testament times and was not a new doctrine (as the Jews may have accused him of teaching). This was not new theology; it was taught by the prophets themselves! (Verse 11, Isaiah 28:16 and verse 13, Joel 2:32)

He is explaining the method God uses to save us: faith, not the response to the gospel which is faith expressed in repentance and baptism (Romans 6).

## 4. Should I be re-baptized?

Many ask this question because they are not sure how to resolve the issue. In Acts 19 we have good information to help us decide this issue. In Acts 19 Paul re-baptized 10 men who had been baptized in the proper way (by immersion) but for the wrong reason (John’s baptism of repentance and preparation for the coming of Christ). He explained salvation to them in terms of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) and re-baptized them so they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, Paul could have explained salvation using any number of images (sonship, clean conscience, clothed with Christ), but he did not, he chose only one image of salvation and baptized them (forgiveness and the reception of the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:38).

Here are the questions to ask when it comes to rebaptism:

### 1. Was I baptized the right way?

By immersion in water, as a repentant believer in Christ. If you are not sure that you have done this (if you were sprinkled or poured, etc.), redo your baptism correctly (by immersion).

### 2. Was I baptized for the right reason?

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The reason for baptism is salvation. That salvation could have been explained to you in various ways:

- Baptized to obey the gospel (Mark 16).
- Baptized to become a disciple (Matthew 28).
- Baptized to be born again (John 3).
- Baptized to receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- There are other biblical reasons, but these should suffice for sake of argument.

When you are baptized for one of the ideas connected to salvation, you receive all the blessings of salvation. If nothing was added or subtracted from the teaching you received about salvation and the role of baptism, the Bible teaches that if you have one of these, you have them all.

If, on the other hand, you were baptized for a reason not connected to salvation: to show that you were saved at some other time, to please your parents, to join a particular church, to do it so you could take communion, you are in error. These are not biblical ideas and you should reconsider and restudy the issue.

- **Biblical Reason + Biblical Method = Biblical Salvation**