

The Place of Baptism in the Christian Faith

1 Peter 3:18-22 (NKJV)

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

There seems to be an endless controversy over baptism in the Christian church.

So then there are many differing opinions out there.

We as Baptist hold a different view than the main line Protestant denominations.

Does this verse teach that baptism saves us?

Or is it the antitype or figure that saves us?

In order to understand this passage we must take a wider view and see what is said about the two parts in this passage.

Baptism and salvation, how do they relate to each other?

Does baptism wash our sins away or is it a symbol or antitype or figure of what washes our sin away?

I. The beginning of Christian baptism.

A. Christian baptism began with the first man called by God to baptize.

1. John the Baptist.

2. John 1:6–8 (NKJV)

a. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

3. Every one of the Lord's Apostles were baptized by John as was Jesus.

a. Acts 1:21–22 (NKJV)

(1) 21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness

Scriptures,

- B. The gospel is the death burial and resurrection of Jesus.
 - 1. And that is what is pictured in baptism.
 - 2. The candidate confesses that he is a sinner and that he has died to sin through faith in Jesus.
 - 3. He is then buried in the waters of baptism.
 - 4. And he is raised from the waters to walk in a new life.
 - C. Romans 6:4 (NKJV)
 - 1. 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
 - D. Colossians 2:12 (NKJV)
 - 1. 12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.
- III. It is the blood of Jesus that washes away our sin and not baptism.
- A. If baptism washes away our sin and saves us then we owe it to the person who does the baptism.
 - B. If the blood of Jesus is was cleanses us and saves us then Jesus gets all the glory.
 - 1. Romans 5:9 (NKJV)
 - a. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.
- IV. Is baptism the means of grace.
- A. According to some churches we are saved by grace but baptism is the means of grace.
 - 1. The idea is that salvation is provided but unless you are baptized you cannot lay hold of or obtain that grace.
 - 2. In Protestant churches there are two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - 3. Through those two practices people lay hold of and receive grace which they cannot receive without them.
 - 4. This makes salvation a process of works.
 - B. But the Bible teaches the faith is the means of grace if there is such a thing.

1. Romans 5:1 (NKJV)
 - a. 1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)
 - a. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.
3. Romans 1:17 (NKJV)
 - a. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”
4. Titus 3:5 (NKJV)
 - a. 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
5. Here regeneration of the Holy Spirit is what washes us and makes us clean.
 - a. This is what happens when God regenerates us by His grace.
 - b. The Holy Spirit cleans us up, not on the outside.
 - c. As Peter says, 1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV)
 - (1) 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

C. That explains Paul’s emphasis on faith rather than baptism for salvation.

1. 1 Corinthians 1:14–17 (NKJV)
 - a. 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.
2. Salvation doesn’t come through water but through faith.
3. Romans 4:5 (NKJV)
 - a. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies

the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Praise be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have been made accepted in Him.
Glory to God who paid for our sins with His own blood.

NOTES:

Submersion under the water represents death, as Paul suggested in Rom 6:3–5. Jesus described his upcoming death in terms of baptism (Mark 10:38–39; Luke 12:50), indicating that submersion under the water aptly portrays death. *Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 194.*

Romans 6:3–5 (NKJV)

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

Colossians 2:12 (NKJV)

12 buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

It is clear from what has already been said, therefore, that Peter did not succumb to a mechanical view of baptism, as if the rite itself contains an inherent saving power. Such a sacramental view was far from his mind. The saving power of baptism is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 194.*

(2) Peter calls baptism the pledge of a good conscience to God (verse 21). The word Peter uses for pledge is *eperotema*. In every business contract, there was a definite question and answer which made the contract binding. The question was: ‘Do you accept the terms of this contract, and bind yourself to observe them?’ And the answer, before witnesses, was: ‘Yes.’ Without that question and answer, the contract was not valid. The technical word for that question-and-answer clause is *eperotema* in Greek, *stipulatio* in Latin.

Peter is, in effect, saying that in baptism God said to those coming direct from the old religion: ‘Do you accept the terms of my service? Do you accept its privileges and promises, and do you undertake its responsibilities and its demands?’ And, in the act of being baptized, each individual answered: ‘Yes.’ *William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 282–283.*

Faith comes before baptism

Acts 8:12 (NKJV)

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 8:30-39 (NKJV)

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 33 In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." 34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" 37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." 38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 9:17-18 (NKJV)

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Acts 10:43-48 (NKJV)

43 To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." 44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Acts 16:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Acts 16:29-34 (NKJV)

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.