

# How Does Water Baptism Relate to One's Salvation?

by Raymond C. Faircloth

## Generally Christians Must Get Baptized

Jesus gave both the example (Matthew 3:13-15; John 3:22-26; 4: 2) and the command for those who are believers to undergo immersion in water (baptism):

- ❖ “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, *baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

*So baptism is vital for those who can get baptized. This is because it serves the several purposes of being:*

- A symbol of one's having come into union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5).
- A symbol of one's having buried one's old sinful self and having risen to the newness of the Christian life (Rom. 6:6). It is therefore a symbol of one's having been “born from above” i.e. one's regeneration (Gk. *palingenesia*).
- A statement made in front of other Christians of the above changes in one's life and so showing that one is in the “body of Christ” i.e. the Christian congregation: “For in one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to **drink** of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). (NOTE: This does not mean membership *of a particular denomination*, but rather of what only Christ will determine is his body.)

However, some teach that one is not actually a Christian until one is baptized. Is this the real biblical position? Furthermore, because some believers are too ill or infirm to risk undergoing full immersion in water, does this mean that they are not Christians?

## ‘Baptismal Regeneration’ is not Scriptural

**ROMAN CATHOLIC etc:** The teaching of ‘baptismal regeneration’ originated within the Roman Catholic Church and is also taught by the Anglican Church (C. of E.). Both these churches administer this by the sprinkling or pouring of water, even upon infants and so regeneration supposedly occurs at a time when the child obviously has no faith.

**CHURCHES OF CHRIST etc:** A slightly different version of ‘baptismal regeneration’ is taught by the Churches of Christ, and the Oneness Pentecostal Churches, yet with full water immersion and of believers only. This teaching states that when existing **faith** and **repentance** are **combined in baptism** then regeneration occurs. So the new Christian is not viewed as converted until he/she is baptized.

So with either view this teaching means that a new Christian is “born again”/“born from above”/“regenerated” **only at the time he/she gets baptized** and that one's salvation is completely contingent upon one's getting baptized in water i.e. no baptism = no salvation.

## Do the Scriptures Teach That Regeneration Occurs Before Baptism?

It is the purpose of this study to demonstrate that the Scriptures teach that:

1. A person is regenerated or “born from above” at the time he/she **decides to believe completely** “the good news about the Kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). This occurs before one gets baptized.
2. Baptism is **the outward visible testimony of the believer's inward faith, he/she having been regenerated earlier**. So it is a **symbolic act with spiritual meaning**.

It should become clear from our studies that, although it is necessary to be baptized in obedience to Jesus, **one's salvation is not absolutely dependent on the performance of this symbolic act**. This would be the case when one's circumstances make it impossible for one to be baptised or when one has not realized that this act should be performed in obedience to Jesus.

## Texts Which Seem to Indicate ‘Baptismal Regeneration’

One may get caught up with the idea that if a single verse appears to say a certain thing then that must be what the Bible teaches. However, this is not always the case if there are other Scriptures which can be brought to bear and other known background on the same subject. So the Bible phrase or passage in question then needs to be filtered through what the rest of the Scriptures teach on that particular subject. Otherwise one may easily end up with an unbiblical viewpoint such as ‘baptismal regeneration.’ So part of this study will analyse phrases in the Scriptures that seem to indicate that one’s salvation is absolutely dependent on getting baptised i.e. ‘baptismal regeneration’. A further part of the study will examine the Scriptures which demonstrate that **salvation is through faith in God and because of one’s having the very same faith as that of Jesus Christ**. This means that one becomes a Christian and is regenerated the moment one fully believes—all of which occur before one is baptized in water.

### Does Peter Teach That One Cannot Be a Christian if One Is Not Baptized?

#### 1. “BAPTISM...NOW SAVES YOU”—1 Peter 3:21

Those who teach that one’s salvation is absolutely dependent on getting baptised irrespective of circumstances often point to Peter’s statement which says:

“**Baptism**, which corresponds to this [*the saving of Noah through the flood water*], **now saves you, not as a removal of dirt** from the body but as **an appeal to God** for {as a result of} a good conscience, **through the resurrection** of Jesus Christ...”

However, if Peter was really saying that the act of water immersion is what saves then he would be contradicting the meaning of the following situations and Scriptures:

- a. Peter witnessed Cornelius and household (Acts 10 and 11) receiving the spirit and therefore being in a saved position **before** the actual administering of water baptism so that they were no longer “in the flesh” even before their baptism. This was as Paul states that: “You, however, **are not in the flesh** but in the Spirit, **if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you**” (*Rom. 8:9*).
- b. Peter would have already known of the thief on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:39-43) who had no chance of being baptised and yet was promised life in paradise. This indicates that he too was in a saved position: “In him you also, **when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, **and believed in him**, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**” (*Eph. 1:13*).

It is sometimes stated that this thief was still under the Old Law Covenant and so was saved through that system. However, this is wrong because salvation was now to be through Jesus who had already said that he was in place of the temple system and that he had replaced the sayings of Moses with his Sermon on the Mount. Furthermore, those who believe in baptism for salvation often, in contradiction of themselves, explain that Christian baptism was spoken of by Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3:5) who also must have gained his salvation by being under the Mosaic Law and therefore did not need Christian baptism.

- c. Earlier in his letter Peter had said:
  - ❖ “...since you have been **born again**, not of perishable **seed** but of imperishable, through the living and abiding **word of God**; ...<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is **the good news** that was preached to you” (*1 Peter 1:23, 25*).

If literal baptism in water actually saved (*being born again*) then Peter would have mentioned it in his statement along with one’s reception of the imperishable seed—the message of the good news.

#### SO WHAT IS PETER REALLY TEACHING IN 1 PETER 3:21?

His statement that “Baptism...now saves you” is immediately qualified when he says that such baptism is “*not as a removal of dirt* from the body but as **an appeal to God** for a good conscience, **through the resurrection** of Jesus Christ...” So, although Peter connects baptism with salvation, it is not the act of being baptized that he is referring to i.e. “*not the removal of dirt from the body*.” **It is what baptism symbolizes that is what saves a person** i.e. “*an appeal to God for {as a result of} a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” in that the new believer has identified with Jesus in his resurrection. This, therefore, connects baptism with belief.

It is not the ritual of water baptism that actually changes one's conscience. Such a change should have happened prior to baptism.

The order is always:

1. Change of belief to an inward faith in Christ.
2. Repentance (change in conscience).
3. Being baptized as a public testimony of one's inward faith in identifying oneself with Christ.

NOTE: For the meaning of "an appeal to God as a result of a good conscience" see #2 below.

So the **water baptism is simply the counterpart of the reality—the salvation**. It can only save as a counterpart, not in reality. Yet, from the biblical record in Acts Peter clearly expected any new believer to be baptized as soon as possible after he or she had become a believer. So, it was no wonder that Peter evidently viewed water baptism as almost synonymous with being saved.

## 2. "BE BAPTIZED...FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS"— *Acts 2:38*

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for* (Gk. *eis*) **the forgiveness** of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

This passage appears to be saying that one cannot have one's sins forgiven unless one gets baptized in water and so one is not saved until that action is taken. However, this assumes that the Greek word *eis* translated as "for" in this passage means 'in order to get' i.e. 'in order to get the forgiveness'. Yet in both Greek and English there are several possible meanings. For instance, in English "for" can mean 'because of' as, for example, in the phrase "die for a cause" i.e. because the cause has value for you and not in order to get the cause. Furthermore, the Greek word *eis* has several different meanings. Yet, the famous Greek scholars A.T. Robertson and J.R. Mantey inform us that the word *eis* in Acts 2:38 has the meaning of '**because of**' or '**in view of**' but not 'in order to' or 'for the purpose of.' An example of this is at **Matthew 12:41 and its parallel in Luke 11:32**:

- ❖ "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented **at** (Gk. *eis*) the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

That is, they repented 'because of' or '**as a result of**' or "on the basis of" Jonah's preaching. So, too, Acts 2:38 shows that these new believers got baptized 'as a result of' or '**in view of**' or "on the basis of" their forgiveness of sins because they were already believers. This understanding is further proved by the fact that when John the Baptist baptized "**for** repentance" this meant that these people had already repented and not that baptism caused their repentance or that they were baptized in order to get repentance, but rather that the baptism was "**in view of repentance**" or "**as a result of repentance**." In fact, Peter later gave a sermon encouraging repentance and forgiveness, yet baptism was not even mentioned (Acts 3:17-26). Therefore, when Acts 2:38 is understood correctly it clearly does not teach that one cannot get forgiveness of one's sins unless one is baptized. (NOTE: Examples of *eis* as not meaning "in order to obtain" are to be found in Matt.28:19; 1Pet. 3:21; 1Cor. 1:15; 12:13).

Furthermore, this verse appears grammatically as: "You (plural) repent for {in order to obtain} the forgiveness of your (plural) sins, and let each one (singular) be baptized (singular)." This means that the crowd was being told to repent in order to obtain forgiveness, but the individuals are directed to get baptized; and so shows that baptism and forgiveness are being treated separately. So during Peter's preaching of the good news to Cornelius and household and before their baptism he stated that:

- ❖ "...everyone who *believes* in him **receives forgiveness of sins** through his name." (*Acts 10:43*).

Evidently Cornelius and household had already believed and therefore obtained forgiveness before their being baptized. Therefore Acts 2:38 is more clearly translated as:

- ❖ "“Change your mindset and life-direction,” Peter responded. “And each one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **on the basis of** the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit.”"

Or as suggested by A.T. Robertson and J.R. Mantey as:

- ❖ "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **in view of the forgiveness** of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

*NEGATIVE INFERENCE FALLACY*

Nowhere do the Scriptures say that if a person is not baptized that he or she won't be saved. However, the Scriptures do make it clear that **belief** is both the condition and the requirement for salvation. This is not so for baptism. If it were otherwise then Jesus could never have legitimately given the criminal who was being crucified next to him the assurance of his salvation (Luke 23:42, 43). So, again, although baptism is to symbolize one's union with Christ and that one has been forgiven one's sins, it is clear that the forgiveness has already taken place before the baptism.

## Did Ananias Teach That Salvation Is Always Contingent upon Baptism?

*"BE BAPTIZED AND WASH AWAY YOUR SINS"— Acts 22:16*

❖ "And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized** and **wash away your sins**, calling on his name (Gk. *epikalesamenos*)."

However, Paul had already become a believer because of meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. As he later said:

❖ "For I did not receive it [*the gospel*] from any man, nor was I taught it, **but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ**" (*Gal. 1:12*).

So Paul, in already being a believer, had **already received forgiveness of his sins before he met Ananias** at which time he was already "a chosen instrument of" Jesus (Acts 9:15). In the encounter with Ananias Paul received **holy spirit** while he was still blind and therefore **before he got baptized**:

❖ "...And [*Ananias*] laying his hands on him [*Saul*] he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be **filled with the Holy Spirit**.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and *he regained his sight*. Then he rose and was **baptized**" (*Acts 9:17, 18*).

This regaining of his sight further indicates that Paul had already been forgiven his sins before getting baptized. Also in Acts 22:16 the Greek term *epikalesamenos* (aorist participle) rendered as "calling on his name" can be rendered as "having called on his name" which Paul clearly did from after his meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road i.e. the calling on his name preceded his baptism in water.

*SUMMARIZING:* The words: "...**be baptized** and **wash away your sins**..." must refer to the symbolism of baptism because it is evident that Paul had already been forgiven his sins when he believed. So baptism is a symbolic action to indicate the inner cleansing that has already taken place: "... *But you were **washed**, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (*1Cor. 6:11*).

## Did Jesus Teach That Salvation Is Always Contingent upon Baptism?

**1. "BORN OF WATER"—John 3:5**

"Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again {from above} he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second

time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water** and the Spirit, *he cannot enter the kingdom* of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again {from above}'" (*John 3:3-7*).

Some Christians teach that the phrase "**born of water** and the Spirit" means complete baptism. However:

- a. 'Baptism' is not actually mentioned in this conversation with Nicodemus. The first mention of baptism in this chapter is in a very different setting and concerns John's and Jesus' authorizing of his disciples to administer baptism (John 3:22-30).
- b. Although Nicodemus may have been familiar with John's baptizing work his conversation with Jesus gives no hint that 'baptism' is any part of the discussion. Neither was Christian baptism in effect at that time; so one would have to read into this passage the subject of baptism.

- c. Again if Jesus' phrase "born of water" had meant water baptism then he would have contradicted the many Bible passages showing that entry into the kingdom of God [*salvation*] is by faith (John 3:16, 36).
- d. If, according to some, the thief on the cross was already saved because of being under the Old Covenant then why would Jesus be telling Nicodemus, who was also under that same covenant, that he couldn't "enter the kingdom" unless he got baptized?

*WHAT DID JESUS MEAN BY "BORN OF WATER"?*

There are two explanations alternative to water baptism:

1. As a reference to the physical birth of a human, whereby the water refers to the amniotic sack and in contrast to spiritual birth i.e. "born of the spirit." The problem with this understanding is that Jesus was speaking about one's being "born from above" rather than contrasting physical birth with spiritual birth.
2. The entire phrase "born of water and spirit" describes, not literal water, but different aspects of being "born from above" so that both aspects concern one's spiritual birth, which as we have seen, occurs before water baptism. So the metaphorical phrase "born of water" concerns **one's spiritual cleansing** because water is often a symbol of cleansing in the Scriptures (Ps. 51:2,7; Ezek. 36:25; John 13:10; 15:3; Heb 10:22). This is "***the washing of regeneration...***" (*Titus 3:5*). It is the "*living water*" that Jesus promised to the woman at the well (John 4:10) and to receptive ones in Jerusalem (John 7:37-39). This is the most likely understanding for the following reasons:
  - Nicodemus assumed that Jesus was speaking of being literally "born again" because the phrase in Greek is identical to "born from above" (Gk. *gennethe anothen*) see NRSV and NAB), whereas Jesus restates the phrase as "born of water and spirit" as another way of saying "born from above."
  - The Greek grammar shows the two phrases: "born of water" and "born of spirit" go together as a single detail and so referring to the one birth—the spiritual birth.
  - God's activity as holy spirit is often symbolized by water e.g. pouring, being filled with etc, whereby God cleanses the person (Isa 44:3; John 7:38, 39). This is something that Nicodemus should have known from the Hebrew Scriptures (Ezek. 36:25-27).
  - Furthermore, the phrase "born of water" could not refer to water baptism because the commandment concerning Christian baptism did not apply until after Pentecost.

However, one must keep in mind that baptism is still of vital importance as the symbol of one's having been "born from above" i.e. "born from water and spirit."

*NOTE: DOES "THE WASHING OF REGENERATION" REFER TO BAPTISM?*

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewal of the Holy Spirit..." (*Titus 3:5*).

*In his Notes on Titus 3:5 Barnes says:*

"--The word rendered washing (λύτρον) occurs in the New Testament only in this place and in Ephesians 5:26, where also it is rendered *washing*--" That he might sanctify and **cleanse it [the church]** with the washing of water by the word." ... If this be the allusion, and it seems probable, then the phrase "washing of regeneration" would mean "that outward washing or **baptism which is the emblem of regeneration,**" and which is appointed as one of the ordinances connected with salvation ... The full force of the language will be met by the supposition that it means that baptism is the *emblem or symbol of regeneration*, and, if this is the case, no one has a right to assume that the other is certainly the meaning. And that this is the meaning is further clear, because it is **nowhere taught in the New Testament that baptism is regeneration**, or that it is the means of regeneration...This word (*palingenesia*), occurring only here and in Matthew 19:28, and there **indubitably not referring to baptism**, should not be here understood as referring to that, or be applied to that, for:

- that is not the proper meaning of the word;
- there is no Scripture usage to sanction it;
- the connexion here does not demand it;

- the correlatives of the word (John 3:3,5,6,8; 1 Peter 1:3) are applied only to that great moral change which is produced by the Holy Ghost; and
- it is a dangerous use of the word. Its use in this sense leaves the impression that the only change needful for man is that which is produced by being regularly baptized. On almost no point has so much injury been done in the church as by the application of the word *regeneration* to baptism.

*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains regarding Titus 3:5 that:

If water baptism is the means that produces the spiritual rebirth, we then have the questionable teaching of a material agency as the indispensable means for producing a spiritual result. We accept the washing as a divine inner act, although the experience is symbolically pictured in Christian baptism. In the NT the inner experience is viewed as openly confessed before men in baptism, but **the rite does not produce the inner experience of spiritual "rebirth..."**

So if, **in** Titus 3:5 this does refer to baptism, then it can do so only in as much as baptism is the symbol of regeneration.

## 2. ONE WHO "IS BAPTIZED WILL BE SAVED"—**Mark 16:16**

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does **not believe** will be condemned."

If we assume that the twelve verses from 9 to 20 of Mark 16 are part of the inspired Scriptures, (although by no means certain), then verse 16 seems to indicate that one's salvation is based on being immersed in water. Yet what this verse is really saying is that salvation is based upon being a believer as in line with the rest of the Scriptures e.g. John 3:18; 5:24; 12:44; 20:31; and 1 John 5:13. This is evident from the fact that the latter part of the verse says "whoever does **not believe** will be condemned" i.e. it is belief that matters either way. In other words to prove that baptism is the basis for salvation this part of the verse would need to be rephrased to have said: '**whoever does not believe and is not baptised will be condemned**' or even '**whoever believes and is not baptized will be condemned**' both of which are not what the text actually says. This is another case of Negative Inference Fallacy, whereby one cannot assume that all opposites of a statement must be true. In the case of Mark 16:16 it cannot be said that if a believer is not baptized he will not be saved. We might better understand this with the following parallel structure illustration of: '*whoever believes and comes from London will be saved, but whoever does **not believe** will be condemned.*' It is a logical fallacy to say that one will not be saved unless one has originated from London. Similarly Mark 16:16 tells us nothing about believers who haven't been baptized. Certainly there are two conditions (and in fact more from other texts e.g. go to meetings) relating to salvation i.e. believing and being baptized, yet it doesn't mean that both are absolute requirements for salvation. Clearly the **only basis for salvation is that one must be a believer** and so have the faith of Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

## Did Paul Teach That Salvation Is Always Contingent upon Baptism?

### "CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH"—**Rom. 10:9, 10**

"...because, if you **confess with your mouth** that Jesus is Lord and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you **will be saved**. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth **one confesses and is saved**."

It may appear from verse 9 that to be saved one must be baptized which, at the same time, involves "**confess with your mouth** that Jesus is Lord." However, on this passage *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes that:

The oddity that in our passage confession is given prior mention over believing is **simply due to Paul's preservation of the order given in Deuteronomy 30:14**, which he had just quoted, where "mouth" is mentioned before "heart."

Furthermore, in verse 10 Paul puts this in the normal order of events as: "with the **heart** one believes and is justified, and with the **mouth** one confesses and is saved." So in Romans 10:10 the *Word Biblical Commentary* states:

...the clauses are distinct only for rhetorical effect, as determined by the wording of Deut 30:14. The generalization heightens still further the contrast with righteousness from the law. To talk of the "heart" is to talk of faith; faith operates at and from the level of the heart. To talk of the "mouth" is to talk of confession;

confession is the primary and essential outward manifestation corresponding to faith, not a sequence of ritual “works.” If righteousness is in view, faith which cannot hold back from public expression is the way into that gracious relationship with God. If salvation is in view, confession which springs from a wholehearted inner conviction is the means through which God’s final purpose is achieved. This is what Deut 30:11–14 always looked for, as the resurrection and exaltation of Christ have now made clear.

Yet in neither verse 9 or 10 is there proof that such confession is only at the time of baptism. Paul’s words indicate that at the moment of coming to faith because of his/her receiving of “the good news about the Kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12) it is natural for a new Christian to confess this truth to others with his/her mouth so that he/she “**is saved**” actually prior to baptism.

## Baptism Gets a Limited Mention in Passages about Salvation

In the two books of the NT which teach most significantly about salvation, namely Romans and Hebrews, we find that the words related to baptism are very rare:

- The word “baptism” occurs only in Romans 6:4 and not in Hebrews.
- “ “ “baptisms” occurs just once in Hebrews 6:2 and not in Romans.
- “ “ “baptize” *never* occurs in either book.
- “ “ “baptized” occurs only in Romans 6:3 and not in Hebrews.
- “ “ “baptizing” *never* occurs in either book.

So in these two major books on salvation there is no evidence that salvation *cannot* occur without baptism. So in about 95% of all verses that address the means of salvation water baptism does not get mentioned.

### WHAT DOES ROMANS 6:3 TEACH ABOUT BAPTISM?

“Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus were **baptized into his death**? We were **buried** therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have **been united with him in a death like his**, we shall certainly be **united with him in a resurrection** like his. We know that our **old self was crucified** with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (*Rom. 6:3-6*).

Paul, here, uses the word ‘baptism’ metaphorically to show that our baptism is symbolic of the death of our old person when we believed in Christ and our having identified with his death, burial, and resurrection. Nowhere, in Romans or in his other letters, does Paul teach that a believer won’t be saved unless he/she submits to baptism. However, he does show that the essential factors in salvation are faith and so having God’s favour.

### WHAT DOES HEBREWS 6:2 TEACH ABOUT BAPTISM?

“Therefore let us leave the **elementary teachings** about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again *the foundation of repentance* from acts that lead to death, and of *faith* in God, **instruction about baptisms**, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And God permitting, we will do so” (*Heb. 6:1-3 NIV*).

“*The foundation of repentance...and of faith* in God” comes before “**instruction about baptisms**.” Again there is no warning from this writer that without baptism one will not be saved.

## The Anomalies of the Concept of Baptismal Regeneration

The theory of ‘baptismal regeneration’:

1. Places trust in a rite while ignoring the previously occurring change of heart and the developing relationships between God and the new believer, and Christ and the new believer.
2. Dictates to God that He must now save us because we got baptized, irrespective of whether or not we truly believe. This would be salvation by ‘works’ in just the same way as the Judaizers tried to introduce the regulations of the Mosaic Law as additional requirements for one to be saved (Acts 15:1).

3. Would mean that no one can be saved unless a third party is with them to administer baptism. This, therefore, would limit God as to who can be saved. It would mean that someone who fully believes the good news of the Kingdom, including belief in Jesus' death and resurrection, cannot be saved until he/she has submitted to baptism. Such a scenario contradicts the Scriptural teaching that it is belief that is the basis for salvation.
4. Leaves the countless millions of unbaptized babies who later died before their adulthood choices with no prospect of salvation.
5. Leaves those who undergo death-bed repentance with no salvation. This again would deny salvation to the criminal on the cross.

### One Is a Christian the Moment One Becomes a Believer and Begins to Act as a Christian

- ❖ “But to all who did receive him, **who believed in his name**, he gave the right to become **children of God**”  
(John 1:12).

#### ONE RECEIVES HOLY SPIRIT BEFORE BAPTISM

- ❖ “In him you also, who *heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation, and have **believed in him**, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**, which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13, 14 NAB).

In these texts there is no mention of Christians having to undergo water baptism so that they may become “*children of God*” or be “*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*.”

#### SALVATION IS CONTINGENT ON BELIEF

- ❖ “And they said, ‘**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you **will be saved**, you and your household’” (Acts 16:31).  
*After this they got baptized.*
- ❖ “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever *hears my word* and **believes him who sent me has eternal life**. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).
- ❖ “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. **Whoever believes in me**, though he die, **yet shall he live...**’” (John 11:25, 26).

In these texts there is no mention of Christians as having to undergo water baptism, so that they are placed in the saved position even though the believer should symbolize it.

#### SALVATION IS THROUGH THE GOSPEL

- ❖ “For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the power of God for **salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16, 17).

However, baptism is not the gospel just as Paul also said: “*For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel...*” (1 Cor. 1:17).

#### SINS ARE ALREADY FORGIVEN

- ❖ “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone **who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins** through his name” (Acts 10:43).
- ❖ “...to open their eyes, so that **they may turn from** darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they **may receive forgiveness of sins** and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”  
(Acts 26:18).
- ❖ “...and by him everyone **who believes is freed** from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

In these texts there is no mention of Christians having to undergo water baptism so that they “*may receive forgiveness of sins*.” It is belief only that makes one a Christian.

## One Is Counted as Righteous through Faith Alone

- ❖ "...that He [*God*] himself is just and **counts** among those **just** those who go by **the faith of Jesus**"  
(*Rom. 3:26b Unvarnished New Testament*).  
*The UBS interlinear expresses it as "justifying the one of faith of Jesus."*
- ❖ "And to the one who does *not work* but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, **his faith is counted as righteousness**" (*Rom. 4:5*).
- ❖ "...and be found in him, not having a **righteousness** of my own that comes from the law, but that **which comes through faith in Christ**, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (*Phil 3:9*).
- ❖ "...so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be **justified by faith in Christ** and *not by works of the law...*" (*Gal 2:16*).
- ❖ "But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that **the promise by faith** in Jesus Christ might be **given to those who believe**" (*Gal. 3:22*).

In these texts there is no mention of Christians having to undergo water baptism so that they may be "counted as righteous", or receive "the promise."

## It Is the Spiritual Meaning of Baptism That Matters

- ❖ "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed **by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God..." (*Rom. 12:2*).
- ❖ "...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (*Eph. 4:22-24*).

It is our inward faith and change in character that counts with God and Christ, the baptism being the symbol to show other Christians that this has taken place.

## One Should Present One's Self to God through the Symbol of Baptism

- ❖ "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but **present yourselves to God** as those who have been **brought from death to life**, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness"  
(*Rom. 6:13*).
- ❖ "Whoever **keeps his commandments** abides in God, and God in him" (*1 John 3:24*).

Because Jesus set the example and gave the command to baptize (Matt. 28:19) then whenever Christians are circumstantially able to they should present themselves to God by undergoing baptism by immersion.

## The Importance of Baptism

Just as when an Israelite brought his animal for sacrifice to atone for his sin and then placed his hands on its head to signify transference of his transgressions to the slain animal, so, too, the water baptism of a believer signifies his placing his hands on Jesus as the sacrifice in transference of his sins to Jesus as "the lamb of God."

## The Churches of Christ Version of 'Baptismal Regeneration'

The claim is made by those with this belief that: it is not **faith** alone, **repentance** alone, or **baptism** alone that brings about regeneration/conversion; but rather it is all three elements occurring at the time of baptism. Therefore, 'regeneration' occurs only at the time of baptism. The instances of baptism recorded in the book of Acts are appealed to for support for this concept because all three elements are present at the time of the baptisms. However, the many Scriptures quoted above show that this cannot be the case because a person is converted by his belief as he believes the 'word of the kingdom' (Matt. 13:23; Luke 8:12, 15) and this occurs **before** baptism.

## Summary

1. Baptism is a public declaration of one's already having the faith of Jesus Christ i.e. his belief system (Rom 3:26). It is the holding of this belief system that makes one eligible for salvation.
2. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there a statement to the effect that one is not eligible for salvation if one is not baptized.
3. If baptism was the basis for salvation, it would mean that no one can be saved unless a third party is with them to administer baptism. This, therefore, limits God as to who He can save.
4. If baptism were the basis for salvation then a physical act—a rite has replaced faith as fundamental, and so what a person really is must count for nothing.
5. Scripturally, when one believes, he/she **receives God's holy spirit** and appropriates to themselves all God's promises and blessings. He/she does not have to wait for these until the convenient time for getting baptized (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 20:31; Acts 10:43; 13:39; 16:31). Such a believing person does not come under judgment and has passed from death to life (John 5:24) even before the time of baptism:
  - ❖ "In him we have redemption through **his blood, the forgiveness** of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (*Eph. 1:7*).
6. Notwithstanding the fact that new Christians should be baptized, if 'baptismal regeneration' was the key to gaining salvation it would indeed predominate in the many Bible statements about salvation. As we have seen it does not.

## Conclusion

Although water baptism is a clearly necessary and most important practice for Christians in obedience to Jesus it is equally evident that it is not absolutely essential for salvation if one is circumstantially unable to be baptized, and so the Roman Catholic teaching of '*baptismal regeneration*' is unscriptural.

### APPENDIX

#### For One to Be Part of the "Body of Christ" Holy Spirit Is Given Before Baptism

It is clear from the teaching of Paul and from the situation of the baptism of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-47) that Christians receive holy spirit baptism because they have believed:

- ❖ "In him you also, **when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, **and believed in him**, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**" (*Eph. 1:13*).

#### *BAPTISM WAS NOT PRIOR TO RECEPTION OF HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTS 2:38, 41*

- ❖ "**Repent**," Peter said to them, "**and be baptized**, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah *for {mng: in view of} the forgiveness of your sins*, and **you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**..."<sup>41</sup> So those who **accepted his message** were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them."

Because these 3,000 had "*accepted his message*" their repentance brought immediate forgiveness of sins and immediate receiving of "**the gift of the Holy Spirit**" in harmony with Ephesians 1:13. Being baptized was the next stage in symbol of these changes.

#### *RECEIVING HOLY SPIRIT AS EMPOWERMENT FOR MISSION*

However, how are we to understand the situation in the accounts in Acts 8 and 19 which show that new converts only received holy spirit after baptism? In *Hard Sayings of the Bible* Peter Davids states:

We note in this connection that Acts and Paul use the phrase "baptized in Holy Spirit" **differently** as well. For Acts it indicates precisely this experiential reception of the Spirit as **empowerment for mission**. For Paul (1Cor. 12:13) it describes the action of the Spirit in making a person part of the body of Christ, something closer to regeneration p. 525.

In both Acts 8 and 19 we have the two cases where hands were laid upon the baptizees and then they were empowered by holy spirit to exorcise demons, heal the sick, and to prophesy.

THE SAMARITAN SITUATION IN ACTS 8:15-17

- ❖ “When they [*Peter and John*] arrived, they prayed for them, so that they would receive holy spirit. (In fact, the spirit hadn’t come upon any of them up to then; they’d only **been baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then they **laid their hands on them**, and they received holy spirit. (KGV).

Prior to the arrival of Peter and John, Philip had performed the signs of exorcising demons and healing the sick (vss. 6, 7). After the apostles had laid their hands on the Samaritan baptizees and they had received the holy spirit, Simon the magician also wanted “*this power too, so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit*” (vs. 19). So evidently the Samaritan baptizees had been empowered by the spirit to do what Philip had been doing, namely the signs of **exorcising demons and healing the sick**. However, this does not mean that they had not, prior to baptism, been regenerated by the spirit as shown by Paul.

THE EPHEBUS SITUATION IN ACTS 19:5-7

- ❖ “On hearing this, they **were baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. And **when Paul had laid his hands on them**, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began to speak with [other] languages and to **prophesy**. Now there were about 12 men in all.”

Evidently, after Paul had laid his hands on them, these disciples were empowered by the spirit **to prophesy**. However, this does not mean that they, too, had not been regenerated by the spirit prior to their baptism.

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