

In Search of Sound Bible Doctrine

Introduction

I began to study Christianity when I was in my late forties. I hadn't been raised in any particular denomination (such as Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian), and I didn't know much about the Bible. When I began to study it, I read that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). If a person wants to receive eternal life, he can be confused about how to receive it: some groups, for example, say that we're saved by faith without works (so water baptism—a work—would not be necessary), while others say that we're saved by faith *plus* works (so water baptism *would* be necessary). (Note: *The New King James Version* is quoted throughout this document.)

Since these doctrines about salvation contradict each other, they cannot both be true. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and He would never contradict Himself. God wouldn't say that water baptism is *necessary* for salvation and that it's also *unnecessary* for salvation; that wouldn't make sense. One of these doctrines is true; the other is false. This example shows how some churches are teaching correct doctrine, while others are teaching incorrect doctrine.

Can we be saved if we follow an incorrect doctrine about salvation? Of course not. Only a correct doctrine will save us. In John 8:32 Jesus said to the believing Jews, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This tells us three things: 1) truth exists, 2) this truth can be found, and 3) this truth will make us free from the penalty for sin (which will lead us to eternal life). *Error* will not make us free; *truth* will. An *erroneous* doctrine about salvation will not save us; a *correct* one will. Because eternal life is such an important issue, we must determine whether our doctrine about salvation is Biblically correct.

How do we start? The first thing we need to do is realize that our current doctrine about salvation *really could be wrong*. We need to humble ourselves and admit that we're human, capable of being in error. Even if we've been a member of a particular denomination for many years, and even if we believe that our preachers have taught us correctly about the plan of salvation, *that teaching could still be wrong*. Just because we've always been taught a particular doctrine, that doesn't necessarily mean that the doctrine is true.

A person who has been taught a particular doctrine all of his life assumes that his doctrine is correct. He usually doesn't consider the possibility that he could be wrong. He will have been trained so thoroughly that if someone challenges his beliefs, he usually won't want to listen to his challenger. He might even feel insulted because his challenger is implying that he might not be saved.

It's human nature to guard our beliefs fiercely and proudly. However, when it comes to the issue of salvation, we must let our pride go and stay open-minded. We should listen to our challengers because our doctrine of salvation *really could be wrong*. If we have the right attitude, we'll be glad that our challengers care about our souls.

We should strive to be open-minded like the Bereans in Acts 17:11–12. When Paul and Silas preached the Word to them, the Bereans "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." From these two verses we can learn three things about what it means to be truly open-minded in God's sight:

- Open-minded people give those with a differing belief a fair and honest hearing.
- Open-minded people weigh the beliefs and evidence presented by others in the light of the Scriptures.
- Open-minded people willingly admit when they've been wrong and make the necessary changes.

In His parable about the man who sowed seed, Jesus said that some of the seed "fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:8). Later, when He explained the parable to His disciples, the Lord told what He meant by "good ground":

- In Luke's account He characterized the "good ground" as those who have a "noble and good heart" (8:15).
- In Matthew's account He characterized the "good ground" as one who "hears [listens to] the word and understands it" (13:23).
- In Mark's account He characterized the "good ground" as those who "accept" God's Word (4:20).

Putting it all together, we have this: an open-minded person is one who has a good and honest heart that listens to, understands, and accepts God Word.

I believe that if we examine the Bible logically, we can determine the correct plan of salvation. In this article I share some of my thoughts about that issue. My conclusions could be in error, of course; only God is infallible. To reduce the chance for error, I tried not to misapply a Bible passage by taking it out of context. Second Peter 3:16 warns that people who don't understand the Scriptures will "twist [them] to their own destruction." We must be careful not to force the Scriptures to fit our particular doctrine.

I hope my article will prove to be interesting, and I hope it will give people the desire to reexamine the issue of salvation. I welcome your comments, as noted on the last page of this article.

A Logical Approach to Salvation

Our various churches don't agree on the plan of salvation because they disagree on issues such as grace, faith, works, and baptism. (Note: "Salvation" is the forgiveness of sins, making one eligible for Heaven.) Two people reading the same verse can arrive at two different interpretations (and *both* interpretations could be wrong). Because there's so much disagreement, how do we determine the *correct* plan of salvation? First, instead of examining the issues of grace, faith, works, and baptism (that will occur later in this article), we need to find examples in the New Testament of people actually being converted (becoming Christians). Next, we can make a chart that identifies the converts, the Bible passages where the conversions took place, and the things the converts did (or were told to do) during the conversion process. Then, by examining other Bible passages, we can verify that these things were necessary for salvation.

After we compile the chart and do our Bible research, we should have a clear understanding of how they were saved. Can you and I be saved the same way? Yes. Those converts lived under the New Covenant, and so do we. If we follow the pattern that saved them, then we, too, will be saved. I believe this is a logical approach. If those people were genuinely saved by doing certain things, then we, too, will be saved by doing them.

In the book of Acts we find eight examples of people being saved. The chart below identifies the converts, the Bible passages where the conversions took place, and the things the converts did (or were told to do) during the conversion process.

The chart shows that 1) confession and repentance occurred in two separate conversions, 2) believing occurred in five conversions, and 3) hearing and baptism occurred in all eight conversions. In all eight examples, these people were saved. Does the Bible teach that hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized are all necessary for salvation?

Yes, as Jesus Himself taught in the following passages:

- **Hearing:** "And whoever will not receive you [the twelve apostles] nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them" (Mark 6:11).
- **Belief:** "Therefore I said to you [the non-believing Jews] that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He [the Son of God], you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).
- **Confession:** "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). (Note: When an alien sinner confesses, it means that he's confessing his faith in Christ, not confessing his sins. An alien sinner is a person who has not been saved yet and therefore is not a child of God.)
- **Repentance:** "... unless you repent you will all ... perish" (Luke 13:3). (Note: Repentance involves a change in *our* minds, resulting in a change of our lives; it does *not* involve a change in *God's* mind in regard to forgiving us at that point. Baptism is when our state changes and when God's mind changes toward our relationship with Him, discussed later in this article.)
- **Baptism:** "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

These passages, all spoken by Jesus, teach us the conditions for salvation: we must be willing to listen to the Gospel message (or we will be rejected by God), we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (or we will die in our sins), we must confess and not be ashamed to tell others that Jesus is the Son of God (or Jesus will deny us before God), we must repent (or we will perish spiritually), and we must be baptized (or our sins will not be washed away and forgiven, as discussed later in this article). All five of these commands are represented in the chart below.

Converts	Bible Passage	Heard	Believed	Confessed	Repented	Baptized	Result
3,000 people at Pentecost	Acts 2:37-38	✓	✓		✓	✓	About 3,000 souls were added to the church.
Samaritans	Acts 8:5-13	✓	✓			✓	
Ethiopian	Acts 8:35-38	✓	✓	✓		✓	The Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.
Saul	Acts 9:6-18	✓				✓	
Cornelius and his guests	Acts 10:43-48	✓				✓	
Lydia	Acts 16:14-15	✓				✓	
Jailer and his family	Acts 16:31-33	✓	✓			✓	The jailer rejoiced.
Many Corinthians	Acts 18:8	✓	✓			✓	

Hebrews 5:9 is the verse that brings all of this together: "And having been perfected, He [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." This tells us that if we obey Jesus' commands, we'll be saved. What did Jesus command regarding salvation? He commanded hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and baptism. What do we see in the conversions in Acts? We see the same five things: hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and baptism. If a person does all five things, he will be saved because he has done exactly what Jesus commanded. One who does not obey cannot be saved.

When we obey Jesus' commands, we're doing something that *cannot be wrong*. If we obey all of His commands regarding salvation, *we will be saved*; if we modify or omit any of His commands, we're risking our salvation. Confusion occurs when one says that we're justified by faith (belief) only. (Note: To be justified means that God declares us "not guilty" for our sins.) To say that we're saved by faith alone is to exclude all the other conditions for salvation that are given in the New Testament. To be saved, we need to obey *all* of the commands for salvation. Peter urged his Christian brethren "to make your call and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). We, too, need to be *absolutely sure* that we're saved by obeying all of Jesus' commands regarding salvation.

Disagreement (and Coming into Agreement)

Many churches don't believe that the plan of salvation includes all five conditions: hearing, belief, confession, repentance, and being baptized. They especially don't believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. This article discusses some of the issues that cause disagreement.

To understand any book of the Bible, we need to ask these questions: Who was the writer of the book? Who was he writing to? What was his purpose for writing the book? When did he write it? What was going on at the time he wrote it? If we answer these kinds of questions, we'll get a better understanding of the Scriptures.

Saved by Grace through Faith

Ephesians 2:8–9 say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Grace is kindness that is not deserved and cannot be earned. God's gift of eternal life is an example of grace because we don't deserve that gift. Isaiah 64:6 describes the state of man:

But we are all like an unclean thing,
And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

There are two sides to salvation—God and man—and there are two actions—grace and faith. God's grace offers the gift of salvation to man, and man's faith (his trust in God) performs the necessary conditions to receive that gift. Therefore we are saved by grace through faith. This principle of grace and faith is shown throughout the Bible:

- Genesis 6–7: God's grace made it possible for Noah and his family to survive the flood; Noah's faith in God's condition (building the ark) led him to safety. Noah was physically saved by grace through faith.
- 2 Kings 5: God's grace made it possible for Naaman to be cured of his leprosy; Naaman's (eventual) faith in God's condition (dipping seven times in the Jordan) led him to that cure. Naaman was cured by grace through faith.
- John 9: God's grace made it possible for the blind man to receive his sight; the man's faith in Jesus' condition (washing in the pool of Siloam) led him to that cure. The blind man was cured by grace through faith.

These examples show an important characteristic of God's grace and man's faith: grace contains conditions, and faith involves action. This is also true in the plan of salvation: God's grace contains conditions (hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized) and man's faith involves action (complying with those conditions).

Faith leads to obedience (what some people call "works"), and faith doesn't please God until obedience occurs. If hearing, believing, confessing, repenting, and being baptized really are things we need to do, doesn't that imply that we're saved by works? Don't many churches believe that we're *not* saved by works? That's the next subject in this article.

Are We Saved by Faith Alone?

Many churches believe that a sinner is saved by faith (belief) alone, without works. Baptism, for example, is a work, so they say it's unnecessary for salvation. Paul seemed to support this "faith alone" doctrine in Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Paul continued this thought in Romans 4:2–5: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness."

In Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul again seemed to support the "faith alone" doctrine: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves;

it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

In these examples, Paul said that justification is *without* works; however, James said that we *are* justified by works: “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). Paul and James seem to be contradicting each other, so who was correct? They *both* must be correct, because 1) the Bible is the Word of God, 2) God cannot lie, and therefore, 3) the Bible cannot contain any contradictions. How, then, can we be justified *without* works and *by* works at the same time? It’s because Paul and James were writing about different types of works: 1) Romans 4:2–5 is referring to works of the Old Covenant, 2) Ephesians 2:8–9 is referring to works of merit (such as good deeds that would put God in debt to a person, earning salvation for that person), and 3) James 2:24 is referring to works that God wants us to do, which demonstrate our faith. Each of these works is discussed below.

When Paul spoke of works in Romans 4:2–5, he was referring to works of the law (the Jewish law, or the law of Moses, from the Old Covenant). In the early days of the Christian church, the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians were being confused by a Jewish group called Judaizers, who were teaching the Gentile Christians that they weren’t saved unless they obeyed the Jewish law (such as being circumcised and recognizing Jewish holidays). In Galatians 1:7, Paul wrote that the Judaizers were trying to “pervert the gospel of Christ.” Paul was reminding the Gentile Christians that they were living under the New Covenant, so the “deeds of the [Jewish Old Covenant] law” would not justify them (Romans 3:28).

When Paul spoke of works in Ephesians 2:8–9, he was referring to works of merit (the false doctrine that we can earn our salvation by doing good deeds). All people are sinners, so no amount of good works will earn our way to heaven. We are saved because of the grace of God, who offers the plan of salvation to unworthy sinners.

When James spoke of works in James 2:24, he was referring to works of obedience that God commands us to perform. If we don’t perform those works, we don’t have true faith (our faith would be dead) (James 2:17). If faith does not reveal itself in works, it is not a saving faith. To avoid the works of the law (the old Jewish law), some of the early Christians went too far in the other direction: they had faith (belief) but did not perform works. In his letter, James told these Christians that faith alone would not justify them (James 2:14–26); they also needed to obey God’s New Covenant commands.

James taught that our faith must be demonstrated by works (our actions), and he gave an example in 2:21: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?” Abraham’s faith in God “was accounted to him for

righteousness” (2:23), but it wasn’t faith alone that justified Abraham; it was also his work of obedience that justified him. Just like Abraham, we’re not justified by faith alone, but also by our works of obedience.

Paul and James were not contradicting each other. Paul was referring to the works of the Jewish law and to works of merit (which *don’t* justify us), while James was referring to the works of obedience that God commands us to do (which *do* justify us). When we read about works in a particular verse, it’s important to understand the type of works it’s referring to. It’s false teaching to say that works don’t justify us because the Bible teaches that works of obedience *do* justify us. Baptism, along with hearing, belief, confession, and repentance, are works of obedience, so they are *all* required for salvation. (Some churches who say that belief is necessary for salvation will also say that works are *unnecessary*. John 6:28–29, however, teach that belief *is* a work.)

Like James, Paul taught that works of obedience to God’s commands are necessary for our justification. In Romans 2:6–7, Paul said that God “will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality,” and in verse 10, Paul said that God will give “glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good. . . .” In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul wrote that we’ll be judged by our works: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Both Paul and James taught that we’re justified by our works of obedience to God. To say that we’re *not* saved by works is to ignore the teachings of both Paul and James.

The Bible teaches that we’re saved by faith. When we have true faith, we put our trust in God and we’re willing to do whatever He tells us to do to be saved. Faith (belief) is necessary, but James clarified this when he said that we’re not justified by faith alone. Merely believing in the Gospel of Jesus (faith alone) won’t save us, as the following examples show: 1) “even the demons believe” (James 2:19), and they certainly aren’t in a saved condition, and 2) John 12:42–43 say that “even among the rulers many believed in Him [Jesus], but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Acts 2 shows that if one wants to be saved, he needs to do more than just believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The people to whom Peter was preaching were cut to the heart, so they definitely believed that Jesus, the One they crucified, is the Son of God. They then asked Peter what they should do. If mere belief were enough to be saved, Peter could have told them

that they were now saved. However, because belief is *not* enough to be saved, Peter told them that they also needed to repent and be baptized—and so does every alien sinner. (As mentioned earlier, an alien sinner is a person who has not been saved yet and therefore is not a child of God.)

In Romans 1:5, Paul wrote, “Through Him [Jesus] we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name. . . .” “Obedience to the faith” is doing whatever the Gospel instructs us to do to be saved. Jesus taught that we need to hear, believe, confess, repent, and be baptized. If we do all of those things, we will have been obedient to the faith, and thus we’ll be saved. These are works, but not works of the Jewish law or works of merit; they are works of faith (see 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11). “Works of faith” or “works of God” are things that God commands us to do so that we will demonstrate our faith. These works of God include Jesus’ commands to hear, believe, confess, repent, and be baptized. Faith must be demonstrated by obedience.

In the book of Galatians, Paul said that the Galatian Christians were “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). They were children of God by their faith, but the apostle did not say that they were children of God by faith alone. In fact, the next verse identifies how they became children of God by faith: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” By their obedient faith, they were baptized and became children of God.

Most denominations teach that works are unnecessary for salvation, but at the same time they agree that we’ll be judged by our works. This doctrine is inconsistent because if we’ll be judged by our works, then works *are* necessary for salvation.

Churches today place such an emphasis on the doctrine of grace that they practically exclude the equal importance of discipline. Those who believe that works are unnecessary are living undisciplined, uncommitted lives. We are living under God’s grace, but that doesn’t give us the permission to ignore His commands (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8 and Matthew 7:26–27).

Some religious teachers place the grace of God on one side and the commands of God on the other, thus making them antagonistic. They teach that if man tries to obey commands in order to be saved, he is not depending on the grace of God, and whether or not he obeys God’s commands does not affect his salvation. Some teach that salvation by grace frees one from having to perform conditions for salvation, but they should see that salvation may be by grace and yet conditional. The fact that salvation is conditional is clearly taught in the Scriptures: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My

Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Only those who do the will of God can enter the kingdom: “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9).

We should see God’s grace in all of His commands. Whatever God commands of us is for our own good. His commands for salvation are expressions of His grace. It’s because of God’s grace that He gives us the commands that will lead us to salvation.

“Faith Alone” and the Difficult Path to Salvation

Matthew 7:13–14 say, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Note the word “difficult” in this passage. A difficult task requires a great deal of effort to accomplish it. Belief only (faith only) would not be difficult, so belief only would not be enough for salvation. Salvation is difficult because it requires a Christian to have a disciplined life. Paul knew the importance of that: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Luke 13:24 also explains that it will take great effort to get into Heaven: “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” The Greek word for strive is “agonizomai,” from which the word “agonize” is derived. Few will enter the gate of Heaven because most people aren’t willing to put great effort into obeying God.

Belief (or faith) alone does not demonstrate great effort or a struggle, so that wouldn’t be enough to get one into Heaven.

True Christian Faith Is an Active Faith

We can see how faith, love, and action are connected when we compare Galatians 5:6 with John 14:21. Galatians 5:6 says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” In John 14:21 Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” Galatians 5:6 teaches that faith is demonstrated by love, and John 14:21 teaches that love is demonstrated by keeping Jesus’ commandments. Therefore, our Christian faith includes obedience to Jesus’ commandments. True Christian faith includes obedience to *all* of His commands; faith is not demonstrated by belief *only*.

Christian faith is something we show by our actions. Jude 3 says that Christians are “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” “The faith” is referring to the New Covenant of Christ, and we contend for the faith by striving to obey all of Christ’s commands.

The Law of Christ

James 1:25 says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” James 2:12 teaches, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” The “law of liberty” in these verses refers to the New Testament law of Christ which will give us liberty if we obey that law (it will make us free) (John 8:32).

Romans 6:14 says that we are living under grace and not law, but James said that we *are* living under law. Is there a contradiction? No, because the Bible is talking about two different types of law: the law of Moses and the law of Christ (the Gospel). When Jesus died, the law of Moses was ended; the Christian is no longer living under that particular law (see Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14–15). We are now living under the law of Christ. Hebrews 7:12 says, “For the priesthood being changed [Christ is now our High Priest forever], of necessity there is also a change of the law.” Other passages mention the law of Christ: Galatians 6:2 tells how we are to “fulfill the law of Christ” and Romans 8:2 says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

The Gospel of Christ is called a law because it contains rules for conducting our lives and commands to be obeyed (1 John 5:3), such as belief, confession, repentance, baptism, and remaining faithful until death. When Paul said that “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28) and that “no one is justified by the law in the sight of God” (Galatians 3:11), Paul was referring to the law of Moses and not the law of Christ. It’s important to understand this point because we *are* living under a law—the law of Christ. Just like any law, there are rules we need obey—including Christ’s commands for salvation.

“The Sinner’s Prayer”

In Luke 18:9–14, Jesus told the parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector who both went to the temple to pray. The tax collector humbly confessed to God that he was a sinner. In verse 14, Jesus said, “I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Some people refer to this as an example of “The Sinner’s Prayer,” and using that

example, they say that an alien sinner is saved when he confesses—by praying to God—that he’s a sinner. (As explained earlier, an alien sinner is a person who has not been saved yet and therefore is not a child of God.)

There’s a problem with the doctrine of “The Sinner’s Prayer”: the tax collector was not an alien sinner. He was *already* a child of God. We know this because the parable said that he went into the temple to pray, and only the children of God (the Jews) would have gone into the temple to pray. Therefore, the tax collector, who was already a child of God, was not praying to be saved; he was praying because he was an erring child of God who was sorry for his sins. He “went down to his house justified” not because he was an alien sinner who had just been saved; he was justified in the sense that God was pleased with his humble prayer and forgave his acts of disobedience. The tax collector’s prayer is not an example of how an alien sinner is saved, so we must not use that example when we evangelize. A sinner is saved when he hears, believes, confesses, repents, and is baptized.

Another place where “The Sinner’s Prayer” is supposedly found is 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” First John was written to people who were *already* Christians (verse 2:1). Christians receive forgiveness for their present sins by confessing them to God. First John 1:9 is not explaining how an alien sinner receives forgiveness for past sins. (That occurs when he’s baptized in water, not when he confesses his sins to God.)

When we evangelize—whether in person or with information that we mail or leave on door knobs—and if we indicate that a person can be saved by praying for forgiveness, that’s incorrect teaching. If that person prays to God for forgiveness, he’ll think that he’s saved when he actually *isn’t*.

Calling on the Name of the Lord

In Acts 2:21, when Peter was preaching to the crowd at Pentecost, he quoted a verse from the prophet Joel: “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Paul also quoted that verse in Romans 10:13.

Many churches believe that the word “call” in that verse means “pray,” so they believe that a person is saved when he prays (“calls”) to God to confess that he’s a sinner. However, after Jesus died and the New Covenant began, there are no Scriptures that show an alien sinner being saved by confessing his sins to God in prayer (see the previous section, “The Sinner’s Prayer”). Instead, an alien sinner is saved when he hears, believes, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, repents, and is baptized. In the book of Acts (also known as the book of conversions), when

a person was converted, praying to God was *never* a condition for salvation (see the chart showing the conversions in Acts).

If praying to God doesn't save us, then why did Joel, Peter, and Paul say that calling on God *does* save us? It's because "call" in those verses isn't referring to prayer. To understand what "call" means, we can examine the following passages:

1) In Acts 2:21, when Paul was preaching to the crowd at Pentecost, he quoted the prophet Joel by saying, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Later in that chapter, after the crowd realized that they had killed the Son of God, they asked Peter how to be reconciled to God; they wanted to know how to be saved (they asked, "What shall we do?"). Peter had already told them how to be saved in verse 21 (by calling on the name of the Lord), but instead of repeating that verse, he said something different: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (verse 38). A wonderful fact about the Bible is how one verse will sometimes parallel another, giving us a fuller understanding of the Bible. Acts 2:21 and 2:38 are parallel verses, and they clarify each other. Peter was indicating that a person "calls" on the Lord by repenting and being baptized. The following chart compares the key phrases from those two verses:

Acts 2:21	calls on the name of the Lord	shall be saved
Acts 2:38	Repent, and . . . be baptized	remission of sins

"Shall be saved" is equivalent to "remission of sins"; therefore, by looking at the chart, calling on the name of the Lord includes both repentance and baptism.

2) In Acts 22:16, Ananias told Paul, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This verse is not telling us to do two separate things (to be baptized and then to call on the name of the Lord). The word "calling" modifies the preceding phrase about baptism. This passage indicates that a person "calls" on the Lord by being baptized. First Peter 3:21 also teaches that baptism is how a person calls on God (see the section "Water Baptism Saves Us").

These examples show that a person "calls" on the name of the Lord when he obeys God's commands for salvation. When an alien sinner realizes he needs God's help, he "calls" on Him by obeying His commands for salvation (such as repenting and being baptized).

Some believe that 1 John 1:9 is showing how an alien sinner calls on God; however, that book of the Bible

was written to people who were *already* Christians, and it teaches that when an erring Christian sins, he needs to confess his sins to God. (See the section "The Sinner's Prayer.")

Conditional vs. Unconditional Election

Hebrews 5:9 teaches that Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." This tells us that if we obey Jesus' commands, we'll be saved. In other words, there are things we must do to receive salvation. This is known as conditional election. This contradicts the false doctrine of unconditional election (Calvinism) which teaches that God chooses, before a person is born, whether that person will be saved or condemned. Man would then have no responsibility in God's plan of salvation. Calvinism teaches that if God decides that a particular person will not be saved, that person would have no hope, even if he sincerely tried to obey God. That's illogical and unscriptural. The Bible clearly teaches that each person is given a choice regarding his salvation: he can believe or be condemned (John 8:24), confess or be denied (Matthew 10:32-33), and repent or perish (Luke 13:3).

The Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14) shows that salvation is offered, and we have a choice of whether we want to be saved. God made the offer, and we decide whether we want to comply with the conditions for salvation. This differs from Calvinism that says we don't have a choice of whether we want to be saved.

If God chooses who will be saved, that would make God a respecter of persons. That means that He would be showing partiality when He chose one person over another. The Bible, however, teaches that God is *not* partial (Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25, and 1 Peter 1:17). We are all equal in God's eyes, and each of us will be judged by the same standards. Those who choose to obey God's conditions for salvation will be saved; those who don't obey will be lost.

The following two verses from John 6, spoken by Jesus, might seem to indicate that God forces the human will toward Him:

- "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (verse 44).
- "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father" (verse 65).

God does not force people to come to Him; instead, hearing the Gospel of Christ is what causes a person to be drawn to God (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). When a person understands that he's a sinner in need of God's forgiveness, it's his own decision to come to Him. A man can refuse to come and God does not

force him, but Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). In John 6:45, Jesus said, "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." Romans 1:16 teaches that the Gospel of Christ "is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Hearing the Gospel of Christ is what causes a person to be drawn to God. Faith comes only through the hearing or reading of God's Word, not through miraculous intervention in which God would implant faith in a person.

God wants everyone to be saved:

- Ezekiel 33:11 says that God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."
- 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
- 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

The fact that God wants everyone to be saved refutes Calvinism, because a loving God who wants everyone to be saved is not going to automatically condemn *anyone*.

Jesus said in John 10:9, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." This teaches that *anyone* can be saved. God offers eternal life to *everyone*, so He's not going to prearrange a particular individual to be condemned.

People have accepted Calvinism for centuries partly because they have misunderstood the word "predestined" in passages such as Romans 8:29–30 and Ephesians 1:5. The word "predestine" means literally "to set out boundaries in advance." Before God created the world, He defined the boundaries for the people who would enter His kingdom. He decided in advance (predestined) that those who would believe and obey Christ would be His chosen people. God did not predestine which particular individuals would accept Christ as Lord, but He predestined that whoever did so would be adopted into His family. The word "predestine" is used in reference to God's plan of salvation, not the destiny of certain people. God predestined the plan of salvation; He doesn't predestine the eternal fate of particular individuals.

Ephesians 1:4 explains that before the world began, God decided that the type of people He would choose "should be holy and without blame before Him." God had conditions for those He would save. Those He would save were to be "holy" and "without blame." This separation from sin and guilt is attained only "in Christ," and we are to "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast" (see Colossians 1:21–23).

Some people mistakenly believe that 2 Thessalonians 2:13 shows that God predestines our fate: "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth." Some believe that the phrase "from the beginning" refers to the beginning of creation, but that's a misinterpretation for two reasons: 1) in that same verse, it says that God chose them because of their "belief in the truth" (not because God prearranged them to be chosen); and 2) in the next verse (2:14), it says that God called them "by our gospel [of Jesus Christ]" (He didn't call them at the beginning of creation).

In 1 Corinthians 9:27 Paul said, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." This shows that even Paul, one of the greatest apostles, had to fight temptation. This opposes Calvinism, because if Paul had been predestined to be saved, he wouldn't have had to discipline himself to keep from sinning.

BAPTISM ISSUES

Purpose of Baptism

What is the purpose of baptism? In Acts 2:38, Peter said to the crowd, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." In Acts 22:16, Ananias said to Saul [Paul], "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." These Scriptures teach that baptism is where our sins are forgiven. Baptism—like belief, confession, and repentance—is one of God's conditions for salvation. If we haven't been baptized (and for the right reason), we are not saved because our sins have not been forgiven.

One cannot baptize himself. Acts 22:16 shows passiveness which in turn depicts submission.

Holy Spirit Baptism and Water Baptism

John the Baptist (in Matthew 3:11) and Jesus (in Acts 1:5) promised there would be a baptism with the Holy Spirit, and that promise was fulfilled in the book of Acts. We also read passages in the Bible about *water* baptism, such as in Acts 8:38 when "Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he [Philip] baptized him."

When one reads a passage about baptism, sometimes he's confused about whether it's referring to Holy Spirit baptism or water baptism. Whenever baptism is being *commanded* in a verse, it's referring to water baptism. That's because Holy Spirit baptism was not a command; it was a promise from God (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4–5), and a promise cannot

be commanded or obeyed. The following commands, therefore, refer to water baptism:

- “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
- “And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).
- “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

The baptism of Romans 6 (which places us into Christ) is water, because water baptism is the one which involves obedience to a command (verse 17).

By the time Paul wrote the book of Ephesians (around A.D. 60), there was only “one baptism” (4:5). This means that only “one baptism” exists today, as well. Logically, *water* baptism is that “one baptism” because it’s the one associated with the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) or salvation (1 Peter 3:20–21).

How Is One Born Again?

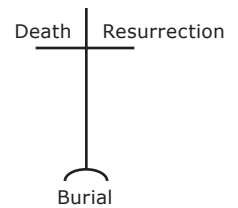
In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus that “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Jesus was referring to some sort of rebirth. Two verses later, He said that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Does “born of water” refer to our first (physical) birth (in which our mother’s water breaks), or does it refer to a second (spiritual) birth (being “born again,” as stated in John 3:3)?

To determine what Jesus meant, we need to search the Bible for passages that describe some sort of rebirthing process. Next, we need to obey those passages to be certain that we’ve been born again. Romans 6:3–9 show how baptism is a perfect picture of being born again (where we die and are raised to new life):

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.”

As those verses teach, when we’re baptized 1) we die and are buried with Christ (when we are submerged in the baptismal water), 2) we are “freed from sin”

(our sins are washed away and forgiven, as described in Acts 2:38 and 22:16), and 3) we are raised to new life (we are born again when we are raised from the water). The small graphic visualizes the burial in water and the raising from it. Baptism clearly illustrates a “born again” process (we die and are raised to new life), and it also shows how we are “born of water” (the baptismal water).



Colossians 2:11–12 also explain how we’re buried with Jesus in baptism: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 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.”

When we’re physically born, we have newness of life. When we’re baptized, we also have newness of life. In both cases, we are born: in our physical birth, we are born for the first time; in baptism, we are born for the second time (born again).

Romans 6:7 shows that baptism is where our sins are forgiven: “For he who has died has been freed from sin.” Baptism is where we die (with Christ), and, according to that verse, when we die, we are freed from sin. Therefore, when we’re baptized, we die and our sins are forgiven.

Romans 6:17–18 teach that a person will be “set free from sin” when he obeys “that form of doctrine” that was taught to him. “Form” means a pattern or picture, and the “doctrine” is referring to the Gospel of Christ, which is His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Romans is saying that when “that form of doctrine” is obeyed, there is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and there is a setting “free from sin.” Is there a command that results in those things? Yes, water baptism: it pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3–9, as discussed above), and it’s when our sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38 and 22:16).

Many churches believe that baptism is a picture of what has *already* occurred inside a believer, so they believe that a person is saved *before* baptism. However, Romans 6:17–18 teach that baptism is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection which occurs *at* baptism, so a person is saved *at* baptism. Baptism is a picture, but it’s not a picture of the salvation that occurred *before* baptism; it’s a picture of the salvation that occurs *at* baptism.

The Bible teaches that when one is “in Christ,” 1) he has salvation (2 Timothy 2:10); 2) he has redemption through His blood and forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14); 3) he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); 4) he is reconciled to God by becoming holy, blameless, and above reproach in

God's sight (Colossians 1:21-22); and 5) he is righteous before God (2 Corinthians 5:21). How does one get "into Christ" to obtain those blessings? The following two verses teach that baptism is how one gets "into Christ":

- "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3).
- "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

A person who has been baptized is "in Christ," and he receives the blessings that are only in Christ (such as forgiveness of sins). If a person hasn't been baptized, he is "out of Christ," and so his sins aren't forgiven and he's not saved.

Ephesians 1:7 teaches that "in Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." To receive the forgiveness of sins, we need to contact His blood, and we contact it through baptism. Why does baptism give us contact with Jesus' blood? It's because Jesus' blood was shed in His death (John 19:33-34), and Romans 6:3 teaches that we're baptized into His death. When we're baptized into Jesus' death, we contact His shed blood, and our sins are forgiven.

Here's another way to examine Ephesians 1:7: That verse teaches that in Christ we have the forgiveness of sins. We must somehow get into Christ to get that forgiveness. How do we get into Christ? We are *baptized* into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Baptism is where our sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38) because when we're baptized, we're baptized into Christ, and it's in Christ where our sins are forgiven. If a person isn't baptized, he doesn't get into Christ, his sins aren't forgiven, and he's not saved. Therefore, if a person isn't baptized, he's not saved.

Redemption has two parts to it: the price paid and the actual deliverance. The price paid is the blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This price is paid for all men. All men, however, have not been delivered from the consequences of their sins. This deliverance occurs when the sinner complies with God's conditions for salvation. Colossians 1:14 explains that the redemption is in Christ. It follows, then, that the sinner must get into Christ in order to be redeemed by His blood. Paul illustrates in Galatians 3:26-27 that we are "all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Water baptism is how we get into Christ, and once we're in Christ, we've been redeemed and saved.

When we're baptized, we become united with Christ: we die with Him, we are buried with Him, and we are resurrected with Him. We're born again through baptism because that's where we die and are given new life. It's this new birth through baptism that

puts us into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Without baptism, we won't have this new birth, and we won't enter the kingdom.

As we read earlier, John 3:5 says that we must be born of water, but it also says that we must be born of the Spirit. This article has tried to show that being "born of water" refers to baptism, and now it will try to show that "born of the Spirit" is also involved in baptism. We can see the connection between water and the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Titus 3:4-5 is another example of how the Holy Spirit is involved in baptism, and it shows that we're born again (regenerated) with water: "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 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." (The Greek word for "washing" here is "loutron," and it can be translated "laver," which was a large basin used for washing by a priest in the ancient Jewish temple.) The "washing of regeneration" in Titus 3:5 is called the "laver of regeneration" because it's the instrument used for the washing. Just as a priest in the temple would wash in the laver before he entered the holy place, so we are washed by baptism before we enter the holy realm of the church. Baptism is the laver or the instrument for washing away our sins.

John 3:3 and 3:5 are parallel passages, and they show that "born again" means to be baptized in water. In John 3:3 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In John 3:5 He reworded verse 3:3 by saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Here are the key phrases from those verses:

John 3:3	born again	kingdom of God
John 3:5	born of water and the Spirit	kingdom of God

The phrase "born again" is equivalent to "born of water and the Spirit"; they mean the same thing. "Born again" and "born of water and the Spirit" refer to water baptism because that's where our rebirth occurs (we're buried in baptism and then raised to new life [Romans 6:4]). John 3:3 and 3:5 teach that one must be "born again" and "born of water and the Spirit" to enter the kingdom of God; water baptism is how we enter the kingdom of God (it's how we're added to the church [Acts 2:41 and 2:47]).

John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 are also parallel verses. We can see from them that water baptism is how a person is born again and enters the kingdom of God:

- “Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:5).
- “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 . . .” (Titus 3:5).

Here are the key phrases from those verses:

John 3:5	born of water	enter the kingdom of God
Titus 3:5	washing of regeneration	He saved us

When we compare these verses, we see that “water” and a “washing” are involved in our entry into the kingdom of God and our salvation. The phrases “born of water” and “washing of regeneration” are equivalent: they refer to a new birth and a renewing—being born again—by the washing of water. “Born of water” and “washing of regeneration” refer to water baptism. This new birth and renewing through baptism are involved in our entry into the kingdom of God and our salvation.

The following progression shows why baptism is a part of salvation:

- We must be baptized to be crucified with Christ.
- We must be crucified with Christ to be raised with Him.
- We must be raised with Him to walk in newness of life.
- We must walk in newness of life to enter the kingdom of God.

Baptism Is a Burial (Immersion)

The word “baptize” is from the Greek word “baptidzo,” which means to immerse or submerge. Please visit the web page www.summit1.edu/sprinkle/immerse.htm for a discussion about “baptidzo.” Water baptism is depicted in the Bible as a full immersion in water:

- John 3:23 explains that John the Baptist “was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there,” which is evidence that baptism is full immersion.
- Romans 6:4 pictures a burial in water when it says “we were buried with Him [Jesus] through baptism into death.”
- Romans 6:5 in the King James Version teaches that baptism is when we are “planted together in the likeness of [Jesus’] death.” “Planted” clearly depicts immersion.
- Colossians 2:12 illustrates full immersion by saying that we were “buried with Him in baptism.”

Baptism by immersion portrays this burial in water; sprinkling or pouring does not.

As discussed in a previous section, “How Is One Born Again?,” Romans 6:17–18 teach that a person will be “set free from sin” when he obeys “that form of doctrine” that was taught to him. The “doctrine” refers to the Gospel of Christ, which is His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Romans is saying that when “that form of doctrine” is obeyed, there is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism by immersion perfectly depicts this “doctrine”: we die and are buried when we are submerged in the baptismal water, and we are resurrected when we are raised from the water. Sprinkling or pouring does not depict “that form of doctrine”; immersion does. (See the graphic in the section, “How Is One Born Again?”)

Romans 6:5 says, “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.” When we’re immersed in the baptismal water, the “likeness of His death” is depicted, and when we’re raised from the water, the “likeness of His resurrection” is depicted. Sprinkling or pouring does not depict those “likenesses”; immersion does.

Matthew 12:40 compares Jonah in the belly of the fish to Jesus in the tomb. Both were complete enclosures. Baptism by immersion—a complete enclosure in water—pictures Jesus’ death, *burial*, and resurrection. Sprinkling or pouring does not illustrate the complete enclosure of a burial; immersion does.

In Acts 8:38, it would have been illogical for Philip and the Ethiopian to go “down into the water”—both of them getting wet—just to have water sprinkled or poured on the Ethiopian. It *would* be logical, however, if they both went into the water so the Ethiopian could be *immersed*.

Some denominations agree that water baptism is depicted in the Bible as an immersion, but they change it to sprinkling or pouring because

- they believe that the New Testament examples are not binding, and
- human wisdom has altered specific Bible teaching to support people’s religious rites and customs. (Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day for making the same mistake [Matthew 15:1–9 and Mark 7:1–13].)

Baptism Is the Point at Which We’re Converted

In Acts 2:38, Peter said to the crowd at Pentecost, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” Later (in Acts 3:19) the same writer (Peter) said to another crowd, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Those are parallel verses, and the following chart compares the key phrases from those two verses:

Acts 2:38	Repent	baptized	remission of sins
Acts 3:19	Repent	converted	sins may be blotted out

“Remission of sins” is equivalent to “sins may be blotted out,” so “baptized” is equivalent to “converted.” This means that when a repenting sinner is baptized, he’s converted to Christianity because his sins have been forgiven (therefore, he’s saved). Baptism is the point at which a person becomes a Christian. If a person hasn’t been baptized, 1) his sins haven’t been forgiven, 2) he hasn’t been converted, and 3) he’s not in a saved condition. In other words, if a person isn’t baptized, he isn’t saved.

1 Peter 3:21 teaches that baptism “now saves us.” That’s another passage that shows baptism is the point at which a person is saved.

After a person hears the Gospel of Jesus (Mark 6:11), believes that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), confesses before men that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32–33), and repents of his sins (Luke 13:3), he is an acceptable candidate for baptism. Baptism is the final step in the salvation process (see the chart on page 2).

The Scriptures show that the Ethiopian (Acts 8:39) and the jailer (Acts 16:34) rejoiced *after* they were baptized because they knew that baptism was the final step for their salvation.

In the book of Acts, there are eight examples of people becoming Christians. In every case, they were baptized, and in every case baptism was the last step for their salvation. Salvation does not occur *before* baptism; it occurs *at* baptism, because baptism is where a person’s sins are forgiven. Baptism is therefore the precise moment at which a person is saved.

Baptism Is How We’re Added to Christ’s Church

Peter preached to the crowd at Pentecost. Acts 2:41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” Several verses later (in Acts 2:47), it says “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The following chart compares the key phrases from those two verses:

	<i>When the people were</i>	<i>they were</i>
Acts 2:41	baptized	added to them [the church]
Acts 2:47	saved	added to the church

The chart shows that “baptized” is equivalent to “saved.” The two verses, when read together, show that when a person is baptized, he’s saved, and he is consequently added to the Lord’s church (and becomes a Christian).

Another way to see that baptism adds us to the church is to compare the following passages:

- “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).
- “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- “And He [God the Father] put all things under His [Jesus’] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22–23).

Therefore, when we are baptized, 1) we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), 2) we are baptized into the body (1 Corinthians 12:13), and 3) since the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22–23), we are baptized into the church.

Ephesians 5:23 teaches that Christ “is the Savior of the body,” so to be saved, we need to be in that body (the church). Baptism is how we get into the body (see 1 Corinthians 12:13 above). We can’t be saved *outside* the body, so if we’re not baptized, we’re not in the body, and we’re not saved.

The “church” is equivalent to “the kingdom of heaven” as shown in Matthew 16:18–19, when Jesus used the terms interchangeably (also compare Acts 2:38, 41, and 47 with Colossians 1:13–14). This helps us understand more thoroughly how “born of water and the Spirit” is equivalent to water baptism. When we are born of water and the Spirit, we enter the Kingdom of God; when we are baptized, we *also* enter the Kingdom of God (we’re added to the church). Therefore, the terms “born of water and the Spirit” and “baptized” mean the same thing because they both describe how we enter the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 1:4 (discussed earlier in this article) explains that before the world began, God decided that the type of people He would choose “should be holy and without blame before Him.” This separation from sin and guilt is attained “in the body of His flesh” (Colossians 1:22). We are made holy and blameless in Christ’s body, and to get into Christ, we must be baptized. Without baptism, we don’t enter Christ, we don’t become holy and blameless before God, and therefore we don’t get into a saved condition.

When we understand the connection of “Christ,” “the body,” “the church,” and “the Kingdom of heaven,” we can perform phrase substitutions. We can say that we’re baptized into Christ, we’re baptized into the body, we’re baptized into the church, and we’re baptized into the Kingdom of heaven. Also, because “born again,” “born of water and the Spirit,” and “water baptism” are equivalent, we can say that we become Christians when we’re born again, when we’re born of water and the Spirit, and when we’re baptized in water.

Belief and Baptism (Mark 16:16)

Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." This is a powerful verse, and we can learn several things from it:

1) The first part of the verse says that belief and baptism will save us, but the second part only mentions belief. This suggests to some people that baptism isn't necessary for salvation (otherwise, they say, the second part of the verse would have said something like, "but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned"). The second part of the verse, however, doesn't need to mention baptism because John 3:18 says that "he who does not believe is condemned already." That means that if a person didn't believe, it wouldn't matter whether he was baptized or not; he'd still be condemned. Sometimes people will focus on the second part of Mark 16:16 (which describes one thing that will cause a person to be lost) instead of focusing on the first part of the verse (which describes two things that are necessary for salvation).

2) If baptism isn't necessary for salvation, why would Mark 16:16 include baptism in the first part of the verse? Why wouldn't Jesus have just said, "He who believes will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"? Why would He include baptism unless it was significant?

3) Even though baptism isn't mentioned in the second part of Mark 16:16, we know that baptism is still necessary for salvation. Why? It's because 1 Peter 3:21 explains that water baptism *is* necessary for salvation (it "now saves us"), so the first part of Mark 16:16 means that both belief *and* baptism are necessary for salvation.

4) The Bible is the Word of God. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and He would never contradict Himself. God wouldn't say that water baptism is necessary for salvation and that it's also *unnecessary* for salvation; that wouldn't make sense. Baptism is either necessary for salvation or it isn't. It has to be one or the other. Therefore:

- Water baptism either washes away (forgives) our sins or it doesn't. It has to be one or the other. What does the Bible say? Acts 2:38 and 22:16 both explain that baptism is where our sins are forgiven.
- Water baptism is either a condition for salvation or it isn't. It has to be one or the other. What does the Bible say? 1 Peter 3:21 and Mark 16:16 both say that baptism saves us.

Acts 8:13 is another example that shows how belief and baptism are part of the salvation process: "Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip. . . ."

To understand the sentence structure of Mark 16:16, we can analyze the following (non-Bible) sentence: "He who sows and reaps will have bread, but he who does not sow will hunger." To have bread, the person needs to both sow and reap. To have eternal life, a person needs to both believe and be baptized. If the person does not sow, he will hunger. If a person does not believe, he will not have eternal life. Faith is what motivates us, after all (John 1:12).

Baptism and Salvation

First Peter 3:20 explains how Noah and his family were "saved through [by means of] water," and verse 21 says, "There is also an antitype [a true likeness of the flood] 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." The Greek word for "answer" in this verse basically means a "request" or an "appeal." In other words, Peter said that we're saved by means of baptism in water, which is not a physical cleansing of our body, but an appeal to God to fulfill His promise of forgiveness (Acts 2:38), resulting in a clear conscience (see 1 Peter 3:21 in the New American Standard Bible).

Acts 22:16 is another example that shows how baptism is an appeal to God: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." As Saul was being baptized, he was appealing to ("calling" on) God to have his sins forgiven.

The water (the flood) in Noah's day was a foreshadow of water baptism. They perform the same function: they both wash away sin (the flood physically cleansed the world of sin, and the water of baptism cleanses our souls of sin) and they both save (the water of the flood saved Noah from physical death by separating him from the condemned sinners of the world, and the water of baptism saves us from spiritual death by separating us from the sin of our souls).

Peter was not referring to Holy Spirit baptism; he was talking about water baptism. He was comparing the water of the flood to the water of baptism, and he was saying that water baptism "saves us." It saves us because it's the final step of God's plan: hearing, belief, confession, repentance, and *baptism*.

1 Corinthians 6:11 is another passage that explains how water baptism saves us: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Baptism Is a Command

Baptism is not something we can downplay or ignore; baptism is a *command*, as shown by the following passages:

- “Then Peter said to them [the crowd at Pentecost], ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .’” (Acts 2:38).
- “And he [Peter] commanded them [Cornelius’ household] to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).
- “And now why are you [Saul] waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

In 1 Corinthians 1:14, Paul wrote, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.” Some might think that Paul was downplaying baptism, but he wasn’t. He had heard about the divisions in the church at Corinth: some of the church members were showing allegiance to one person in the church, while other members were showing allegiance to another. Paul wrote that there must not be divisions in the church. He was glad he didn’t baptize many people because they might have shown allegiance to him instead of Christ, creating more division in the church.

The Urgency for Baptism

Because a person isn’t saved until his sins are washed away in baptism, it makes perfect sense that there’s an urgency for baptism. In the book of Acts we see some examples of people who were baptized soon after the Gospel was preached to them:

- the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26–39;
- Cornelius and his guests in Acts 10:43–48; and
- the jailer and his family in Acts 16:30–33.

After those people heard the Gospel, they were baptized without much delay; they didn’t wait until several days later.

The Thief on the Cross

When Jesus saved the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), baptism was not mentioned. This might imply that baptism isn’t necessary for salvation. However, as we’ve seen earlier, baptism *is* necessary for salvation: it’s a command (Acts 10:48), it’s where we’re born again (Romans 6:3–9), it’s where our sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38), and it saves us (1 Peter 3:21). If you and I are saved through baptism, how could the thief be saved *without* it?

First of all, how do we know that the thief hadn’t been baptized? Mark 1:5 says that “all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem,” were all baptized by John

the Baptist. Luke 3:7 talks about “the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him [John the Baptist].” The thief could have been baptized during the ministry of John and Jesus (John 4:1–2), and the thief could have been one of the many disciples who “went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66).

Even if the thief hadn’t been baptized, he could still be saved. How? It’s because while Jesus was alive, He had “power on earth to forgive sins” (Matthew 9:6). This means that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins personally. He demonstrated this authority when He forgave the sins of the paralyzed man (Luke 5:20) and the sinful woman who anointed His feet with fragrant oil (Luke 7:48).

Another important point is found in Hebrews 9:15–17, which explain that Jesus is the testator of the New Covenant. In legal terms, a testator is one who has made a legally valid will before his death. While the testator is still living, he is not bound by the terms of the will. When he dies, however, the terms of the will go into effect, and those terms cannot be changed. While Jesus was alive during His earthly ministry, the New Covenant and its terms (His “will”) had not come into effect yet. He could forgive the sins of anyone He chose without having to abide by the terms of the New Covenant (which hadn’t started yet). However, when He died, the New Covenant began, and the specific, unchanging terms for salvation came into effect. All people would be saved in the same manner. One of the New Covenant terms is that we’re required to be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins.

The thief on the cross, the paralyzed man, and the sinful woman weren’t subject to the New Covenant of Christ because Jesus hadn’t died and established it yet. Those situations occurred before the New Covenant began, so that’s not the pattern for us to follow today. Instead of looking for examples of people being saved in the Old Covenant (such as the thief on the cross), we should be looking for examples of how people were saved in the New Covenant (such as the eight cases of conversions in the book of Acts, where baptism was always included in the conversion process).

Infant Baptism

Some denominations baptize babies because they believe that a person is born with sin. The Bible does not support that doctrine, however. Ezekiel 18:19–20 teach that “the son shall not bear the guilt of the father,” which means that a newborn child does not inherit the sins of *anyone* (including Adam). In Matthew 18:2–3, Jesus indicated that children are sinless: “Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

Even if a baby were born with sin, and if he were baptized while still a baby, his sins wouldn't be forgiven. The Bible teaches that a sinner is to be baptized after the following conditions have been met: 1) he hears (and understands) the Gospel of Jesus ["faith comes by hearing," as taught in Romans 10:17], 2) he believes that Jesus is the Son of God, 3) he confesses that belief to others, and 4) he repents of his sins. A baby obviously can't comply with any of those conditions, so his baptism would be invalid. Therefore, a baby is not a valid candidate for baptism.

1 John 3:4 teaches, "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." A baby certainly cannot commit lawlessness (he cannot disobey God), so he cannot commit sin. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, but since a baby doesn't have any sins, he shouldn't be baptized.

Acts 16:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 are examples of "households" that were baptized. Some people believe that any infants in those families would have been baptized, too. This might be true if the term "household" always included infants, but there are verses where the term "household" actually *excludes* infants:

- "And he himself [a nobleman] believed [in Jesus' miracle], and his whole household" (John 4:53b). An infant wouldn't be able to believe in Jesus' miracle, so any infants in that family wouldn't be included in the "whole household" in this verse.
- The keeper of the prison "rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household" (Acts 16:34). An infant can't believe in God, so any infants in that family wouldn't be included in "all his household" in this verse.
- "Idle [empty] talkers and deceivers" during the time of the first-century church would "subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain" (Titus 1:10-11). An infant can't be subverted from someone's teaching, so any infants in those families wouldn't be included in "whole households" in this verse.

These verses show that the term "household" (or even "whole households") can actually *exclude* infants, so when Acts 16:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:16 say that a household was baptized, we shouldn't automatically assume that any infants in those families were baptized. Besides, there's no specific example in the Bible where an infant *was* baptized.

Being Rebaptized

When Paul was in Ephesus (Acts 19), he met some disciples who had been baptized according to the baptism of John the Baptist. Their baptism, however, was not the one true baptism (Ephesians 4:5); these disciples were living under the New Covenant (after

Jesus' death), so the baptism of John was no longer valid. Paul needed to rebaptize these disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

These disciples realized that their first baptism was not done correctly, so they agreed to be rebaptized. The same applies to us today. If we learn that our baptism was not the one true baptism, we also need to be rebaptized. A person is a candidate for rebaptism if, at his previous baptism,

- he believed that baptism was unnecessary for salvation,
- he believed he was saved before he was baptized,
- he believed that baptism is how a person becomes a member of a particular denomination,
- he didn't know the true purpose for baptism (in which case he'd be disobedient according to Romans 14:23, which says, "whatever is not from faith is sin"), or
- he was baptized by sprinkling or pouring. That actually expresses a contradictory concept, since "baptize" means "immerse." See the section, "Baptism Is a Burial (Immersion)," and also visit the web page www.christiancourier.com/feature/2004_12.htm for a discussion about sprinkling. The candidate should understand that true baptism pictures the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ: the sinner is buried in and raised from water, just as Christ was buried and then raised from the dead (Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12).

Just like those disciples in Acts 19, if we realize that we haven't obeyed God correctly, we need to correct our mistakes by doing what God wants us to do. If we truly want to obey God "from the heart" (Romans 6:17), we'll want to understand the purpose and correct method of baptism. If one realizes he needs to be rebaptized but fails to do it, he'd be guilty of James 4:17, which teaches that "to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Summary of Baptism

At the moment a person is baptized, significant changes occur: his sins are forgiven (so he's now in a saved condition), he's born again and becomes a new creature, and he's added to the Lord's church. Water baptism, which is a command to be obeyed, should not be confused with Holy Spirit baptism, which was a promise (which cannot be commanded or obeyed). The New Testament teaches the following about water baptism:

- Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- Baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16).
- Baptism (preceded by belief) saves us (Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21).
- Baptism is when we're born again (John 3:3 and 3:5).

- Baptism is a command (Acts 2:38, 10:48, and 22:16).
- Baptism is a burial (immersion) (Romans 6:4).
- Baptism is the point at which we're converted (Acts 3:19 in conjunction with Acts 2:38).
- Baptism is how we're added to Christ's church (Acts 2:41).
- Baptism puts us into Christ (Galatians 3:27).
- Baptism was always the final step of conversion in the book of Acts.

God commands every alien sinner to submit to water baptism. If a person isn't baptized into Christ, his sins won't be forgiven, and he won't be saved.

Be Faithful until Death

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus instructed the church at Smyrna to "be faithful until death." We, too, must persevere in living God's way, being constantly aware of the awful possibility of slipping back into our old lifestyle (1 Corinthians 10:12).

To remain in a saved condition, we must continue to obey God. The word "if" in many Scriptures shows that salvation is still conditional even after conversion:

- Jesus said in John 15:6, "**If** anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned."
- Hebrews 2:3 teaches that Christians won't escape God's wrath "**if** we neglect so great a salvation."
- Hebrews 12:25 teaches that Christians won't escape God's wrath "**if** we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven."
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-2 teach that a Christian is saved by the Gospel "**if** you hold fast that word which I preached to you."
- Colossians 1:22-23 teach that a Christian will be "holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His [God's] sight—**if** indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard. . . ."
- 2 Peter 1:10 tells Christians to be "diligent to make your call and election sure, for **if** you do these things you will never stumble."

In Mark 12:28, a scribe asked Jesus, "Which is the first [most important] commandment of all?" Jesus replied by referring to Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." We demonstrate our love for God by obeying Him at all times with every part of our being. Jesus said in John 14:21a, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me." Our obedience

to God must be our top priority; it must come before everything else in our lives.

CONCLUSION

We should have a desire to know precisely what the Bible teaches about salvation or any subject. Proverbs 2:1-6 say,

My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

It's important for all of us to understand God's commands, including His commands for salvation. In Ephesians 5:17, Paul wrote, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." A good way to get understanding is simply to spend some time with the Bible. Acts 17:11 is a great example of how some people did this very thing: the people in the city of Berea "received the word [the Gospel of Jesus] with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

It's important to have Bible teachers, but it's *more* important to examine the Bible for ourselves to see whether our teaching has been correct. We need to "test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and "test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). The epistles (letters) were written during the time when false teachers were present. The epistles teach that we are only to follow the truth, so we need to find out what the truth is.

One way to examine the Bible is to use Internet resources such as www.biblegateway.com. At that site you can search from many versions of the Bible by chapter and verse, keywords, and topics.

As you investigate the Bible, you should ask: "What doctrines and truths is this passage teaching? What doctrinal errors is it exposing?" And then: "What changes do I need to make in my thinking in order to bring it in line with what the Scriptures teach?"

We should test our doctrine to see whether it holds up easily and consistently with *all* of the Bible. With the Bible, we can quote certain Scriptures to support our doctrine, but the important thing is whether our doctrine holds up when we look at *all* the Scriptures.

Common sense is a wonderful tool to help determine the meaning of Scripture. If our doctrine doesn't make sense when we compare it with certain pas-

sages in the Bible, it's possible that our doctrine is faulty.

If we have drifted away from what the Lord has commanded, we should be quick to make changes to get back to the original pattern. King Josiah, in chapters 22 and 23 of 2 Kings, was quick to make changes. When one of his scribes read to him the Book of the Law, the king realized that "our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book" (2 Kings 22:13). He commanded the people to "keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant," and he destroyed the idols that people had made. Josiah made a sincere effort to follow God correctly; we, too, should have that same desire.

Another example of someone who was willing to change was Apollos in Acts 18. He was a preacher who "taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John" (verse 25). When Aquila and Priscilla met with him, he accepted their correction.

The disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19) were also willing to make changes. When Paul told them that their baptism according to John was invalid, they agreed to be rebaptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We need to examine our doctrine to be sure that we "speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11); we need to speak where the Bible speaks.

An important point to remember is that we won't find the plan of salvation in one or two verses. The Bible isn't written that way. Isaiah 28:10 describes how the Bible gradually gives us understanding when we examine it bit by bit:

For precept must be upon precept,
precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little.

We need to study *all* of the Bible to get its full meaning. If we base our understanding on just *parts* of it, we risk having a faulty doctrine. We mustn't look at one particular Scripture as our sole source of salvation, because the Bible teaches that there is more than one condition for salvation. For example, just because a Scripture about faith doesn't mention baptism, can we assume that baptism isn't a part of salvation? Just because we read a Scripture about confession that doesn't mention repentance, does that mean that repentance isn't a part of salvation?

When we evangelize, we should model our speeches after Peter, teaching people to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Peter did exactly what Jesus talked about in Luke 24:47: "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Because the early disciples preached repentance and baptism, shouldn't we preach those same things?

We need to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), not just portions of it. We shouldn't teach an alien sinner only certain parts of the Gospel (such as having faith); we need to do as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." Jesus' commands include belief, confession, repentance, and being baptized. If we want to preach the Gospel in the way that Jesus instructed, we need to include all of His commands for salvation.

Our relationship with God depends on our willingness to obey Him correctly. We need to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). First John 2:3 teaches that "we know that we know Him [Jesus], if we keep His commandments."

All of us need to lay aside our preconceived ideas and prejudices, study God's word with an open, appreciative, and accepting mind, and learn to love the Lord and obey His will. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15), and "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). We should seek the will of the Lord and serve Him as He wants.

Ask your brethren to pray for each other, "to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Colossians 1:9). Pray for wisdom for yourself, and God will give it to you (James 1:5).

If you'd like to download a PDF of this article, as well as another article called "A Logical Response to Miracles," please visit my website at www.sunflower.com/~mark1230/.

For additional information, I encourage you to visit the website www.ASiteForTheLord.com. That site contains a great deal of information about becoming a Christian and living a Christian life. If you have questions or comments about this article or about that website, please contact the webmaster/author of that site in one of the ways listed on his contact page. If you'd like to study with someone in person, please contact the webmaster; there's an excellent chance he knows of someone in your area who'd be happy to meet with you. You may also contact me at mark1230@sunflower.com. I'd be very glad to hear from you.

I believe that Biblical truth can be found if people share their thoughts about the Scriptures and listen to each other open-mindedly. Salvation is priceless, so I believe it's important for all of us to determine what the Bible teaches about salvation.