

SEVEN KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT WATER BAPTISM



Dennis M. Rokser

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial and confusing subjects in Christendom today is the issue of “water baptism.” Ironically, there is not a book available in my large library that I could give to someone who would inquire on this particular subject. It is my observation that there seems to be a lot of ignorance and wrong doctrine today regarding the Bible generally, but this is particularly true when it comes to water baptism. By God’s grace, I pray that this booklet might be used by the Holy Spirit to help clear up this confusion.

Is Water Baptism Scriptural?

After Jesus Christ’s substitutionary death and bodily resurrection, He met with his eleven disciples (Judas, an unbeliever, had already hung himself in remorse over his betrayal of Jesus). In what is commonly referred to as “The Great Commission,” the Lord Jesus Christ declared,

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Verse 19 makes it clear that water baptism is biblical. Christ’s disciples were commanded to “disciple all nations” (literally—disciple all people groups). This would involve baptizing those who had heard the Gospel of Christ and believed in Him. Discipleship would also include teaching these believers in Christ the life-transforming truths of God’s Word for spiritual growth into

Christ-likeness (1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). But while even the casual reader of the Bible acknowledges that water baptism is scriptural, this is often where the agreement ends and the discord begins. The confusion, controversy, and dissension regarding water baptism seems to center in three primary areas.

Controversy 1: The NECESSITY of Water Baptism

What does water baptism do?

- Is it necessary for salvation?
- Is it a crucial part of spirituality for the believer?
- Is it a means to sanctification?
- Is water baptism a biblical requirement for church membership?
- Is it a public proclamation?
- Is it even for the church age?

Controversy 2: The MEANING of Water Baptism

What does water baptism mean?

- Does it wash away your sins?
- Is it a channel for God's grace?
- Does water baptism enter you into God's covenant of grace?
- Does it make you spiritual?

- Or is it symbolic in meaning?
- If so, what does it proclaim?

Controversy 3: The MODE of Water Baptism

How is water baptism to be done?

- Are you to pour, sprinkle, or immerse?
- Are you to baptize babies, children, or adults?
- Is it to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- Or are you to baptize in the name of Jesus Christ?
- Must it be done in a lake, river, fountain, or baptistry?
- Can any person baptize someone or must it be done by a pastor or priest?

The Final Authority of Truth

By now it should be obvious that there are many questions that need to be answered concerning the subject of water baptism. In this booklet, I have selected seven key questions which are designed to answer the most significant issues regarding this controversial yet biblical subject. But how does one determine what is right?

As you read, please note that the sole and singular appeal for God's final truth on these issues is the written Word of God—the Bible. It is not a person's opinion, a church's tradition, or an individual's experience. So what does the Bible

declare without apology regarding its origin, authority, and sufficiency?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. (John 17:17)

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Since the Bible is nothing less than the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, you would do well to heed the example of the Bereans upon hearing the apostle Paul.

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. (Acts 17:10-12)

Even though these Bereans were hearing an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul, nor the church were the final authority of truth. So what was the standard?

...*(they) searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.* (Acts 17:11)

Question 1

IS WATER BAPTISM NECESSARY FOR ETERNAL SALVATION?

The first question we want to address is perhaps the most basic and certainly the most important issue: Is water baptism necessary for eternal salvation? There is no greater issue than your salvation and eternal destiny—as it will be either eternal Heaven or Hell (Matthew 7:13-14; 25:46).

Whether you realize it or not, many churches and religious organizations believe water baptism is a necessary requirement for salvation and serves as a means to regeneration.¹

While they believe that water baptism may not fully guarantee salvation, it is believed to be a necessary part of salvation. But is this true? What does the Bible teach?

What Is Necessary For Salvation?

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:17-18)

¹ In my files or on my bookshelf I have articles by the following churches teaching baptismal regeneration either as an infant or an adult: Roman Catholicism; Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; American Free Lutheran Church; Missouri Synod Lutheran Church; The Church of Christ; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons); the Episcopal Church, etc.

Notice, Christ did not send Paul to baptize. Yet this does not mean that he never baptized any believers; for he did. Nor does this imply that the apostle Paul was against the practice of water baptism in this church age in its proper place. For he wrote just prior to this,

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. (1 Corinthians 1:14-16)

However, baptizing believers was *not* the emphasis of Paul's ministry. And due to divisiveness within the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 1:10-13), he was thankful for his limited participation in their baptisms, "lest any should say I have baptized in my own name."²

Verse 17 literally translates, "for Christ sent me not to baptize but to evangelize by preaching the Gospel." The word *euangelizō* is translated "preach the Gospel" and literally means "to evangelize." In other words, when someone is evangelized this does not include baptism. Why? Because receiving salvation by God's grace is not equivalent with being baptized. Water baptism is not part of God's plan of salvation. It is not what the Gospel is all about. No wonder verses 17 and 18 go on to emphasize,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of

² Hyper-dispensationalist C. R. Stam totally misses this point when he writes, "Indeed, if he had been sent to baptize it would surely have been a sin on his part to thank God that he had baptized so few among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:14-16)." (*Our Great Commission*, p. 34)

the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
(1 Corinthians 1:17-18)

What Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

The Gospel centers in the message of the cross of Christ, for it was there that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. The Gospel clearly is not a rite that is administered. It is a message of good news from God about salvation that is to be proclaimed. In fact, the most definitive passage in the New Testament explaining to us the very content of the Gospel is found in this same book, 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.
(1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

First of all, **the Gospel of salvation centers in a Specific Person: namely, JESUS CHRIST:** “that CHRIST” (v. 3). This is significant because of *who* Jesus Christ is.

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

Being the unique God-man, Jesus Christ alone qualified to be our Redeemer as He was born and lived outside the slave-market of sin. Furthermore, being deity assures us that His work is perfect. On the other hand, being born as a man, Jesus Christ then could not only reveal God to man (John 1:18), but He could “die” in full payment for the sins of the entire world.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Second, the Gospel of salvation centers in a Specific Work: “that Christ DIED...and that He ROSE AGAIN” (vv. 3-4).

The verb “died” underscores that Christ’s death is a completed past event (aorist tense) that He voluntarily chose (active voice). It is a fact of history, not some religious myth (indicative mood).

Jesus had to die to provide salvation for mankind, as the penalty for sin is “death” (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12; 6:23).

Thus, Christ’s sinless life, amazing miracles, flawless example, deep compassion, divine teaching, and royal birthline clearly indicated that He was nothing less than God manifested in the flesh and the rightful heir to the throne of David. *Yet, it was only His death that could pay for our sins.*

And what is the proof of His death? “and that he was buried...” (1 Corinthians 15:4)

The second aspect of Christ’s work is that He “rose again.” The phrase “He rose again” (*egegertai*) is a perfect tense verb indicating past completed action with abiding present results. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on the third day and He remains alive to this very day. He is a living Savior who got out of death, hell and the grave alive! The passive voice here indicates that God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the canceled check that Christ’s death satisfied every holy demand of God relative to our sins so that He raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 4:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The indicative mood again portrays Christ’s resurrection as a historical fact, not a religious fable. And what is the proof that Christ was raised from the dead? “... and He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve” (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Third, the Gospel of salvation centers in a Specific Accomplishment: “Christ died FOR OUR SINS” (v. 3). Why is this significant? First of all because it indicates a *substitutionary sacrifice*. The Greek word “for” (*hyper*) is one of three Greek prepositions that underscore the concept of substitution (*hyper, anti, peri*). *Hyper* communicates how Christ died *on behalf of* our sins.

The second reason the phrase “for our sins” is significant is because it reveals Christ’s death as a *completed sacrifice*. Note how “for our sins” is only attached to Christ’s death. Why? Because when He cried, “IT IS FINISHED,” (John 19:30) the sins of all mankind for all time were PAID IN FULL on the cross.

What does all of this mean? It means that no mass, no fires of purgatory, no sacraments, no amount of good works, no

personal suffering, no indulgences, no rituals, including baptism etc., can atone for our sins. "IT IS FINISHED!"

This also indicates that our sins, though making us worthy of God's judgment, will never actually condemn us to eternal hell. Why? Because Jesus Christ fully paid for our sins past, present, and future. In fact, all of our sins were future when Christ died for us. What ultimately condemns a sinner to hell is not their sins, but their rejection of Christ through their unbelief.

*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, **because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.***
(John 3:18)

*And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, **because they do not believe in Me.*** (John 16:8-9)

*And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that **they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth** but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

This then means that regardless of the nature or number of sins that we have committed, God, by His grace, is willing and wanting to save us. And without compromising his holy character, God will save every sinner who places their faith in Jesus Christ alone, since Christ died for all of their sins and rose again.

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

No wonder the Gospel is called GOOD NEWS!

Dear Friend, do you understand what this means to you? It means that Jesus Christ died as your substitute. He died as your sacrifice. He died taking your punishment. He died on your behalf, paying for your sins. And then He rose again as death, Hell, and the grave could not hold Him captive. He is no longer on a cross. He has been raised from the grave, and as a living Savior He offers to you the gift (not reward) of salvation.

*For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 6:23)*

A Doctrinal Dilemma

The Apostle Paul was sent by Jesus Christ primarily not to baptize but to evangelize. As we have observed, this involved preaching the message of the Gospel, which has nothing to do with water baptism. Think about it. How could physical water resolve a spiritual problem? How would the act of water baptism do something supernatural for you while taking a shower or a bath will not? Is there something special about the water? Is there something special about the person who administered it to you? No, not at all.

An Anticipated Response

But some churches will say, “Yes, it is true that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins and rose again. But the benefits of Christ’s work are channeled to you through the sacraments. And yes, He died for your sins so that water baptism now acts as the funnel, the instrument, the channel, the means by which the benefits of Christ are conferred on you when you participate in this ritual.” But what saith the Scriptures?

*Therefore we conclude that a man is **justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.** (Romans 3:28)*

*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, **his faith** is accounted for righteousness. (Romans 4:5)*

A Needed Clarification

But sometimes people retort, “Though water baptism is necessary for salvation, water baptism is not a work.” Dear Reader, if water baptism is not a work, what is it? And if water baptism is not a work, what is a work? If you notice closely what Romans 4:5 states, you will observe that the only thing excluded from being a work is faith. “*But to him who does not work, but believes...*” (faith in Christ means you actually trust the finished work of Another!).

Since there is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:5), the only means of receiving the gift of salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The only basis for your salvation is the finished work of Christ on the cross. And when any sinner has placed his/her faith in Jesus Christ alone, at that moment

there is an invisible transaction that occurs between the sinner and God in which the gift of salvation becomes theirs personally. Thus, a person can *know* he has eternal life based on what *Christ* has done. This is absolutely guaranteed by the promises of God, which he/she in simple childlike faith have accepted. Read carefully the testimony of God:

*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. **These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*** (1 John 5:11-13)

But some argue, “Baptism isn’t a work because God commands it in the Bible.” Ironically, Romans chapter 4 discusses the place of an Old Testament *commanded* ritual and its relationship to salvation—the act of circumcision. And what does the apostle Paul, as directed by the Holy Spirit, write?

Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”

*Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. **How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.** And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while **still uncircumcised**, that he might be the*

*father of all those who **believe, though they are uncircumcised**, that righteousness might be imputed to them also. (Romans 4:6-11)*

Circumcision in the Old Testament, like water baptism in the New Testament, was a Biblical command. Yet it was still classified by God as a “work” which could *not* save. Paul’s point is that to be declared righteous or justified before a Holy God is through faith alone in Christ alone plus nothing! The gift of salvation and being declared righteous before God is not by works, ritual, or law. Only then can the believing sinner be assured of salvation as it depends on the work of Christ for them, not a work of man for God.

*Therefore it is **of faith** that it might **be according to grace**, so that the promise might **be sure** to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. (Romans 4:16)*

This is why Ephesians 2:8-9 emphatically declares,

*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.*

Does Water Baptism Give a Person the Holy Spirit?

How does a person receive the Holy Spirit?

*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, **the gospel of your salvation**; in whom also, **having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**. (Ephesians 1:13)*

How do you receive, the Holy Spirit? Through water baptism? No. But through believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Does Water Baptism Make a Sinner a Child of God?

How does one become a child of God? Through water baptism as an infant or adult? No! For John 1:12 instructs us,

*But as many as **received Him**, to them He gave the right to become **children of God**, to those who **believe in His name**.*

Is Water Baptism Necessary to Have Your Sins Forgiven?

The apostle Peter declares in Acts 10:43,

*To him (Jesus Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, **whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins**.*

Notice again how water baptism is conspicuously absent.

Is This a Serious Matter?

Dear Reader, do you realize that eternal Hell will be filled with baptized people who never trusted the Savior *alone* to redeem them? In fact, when one believes that water baptism is necessary for salvation, three fatal errors result.

First, it violates and nullifies God's grace. If you require or add even one human or church work to Christ's finished work on the cross, you say in effect, "Christ has not done it all." Dear friend, was Christ lying when He triumphantly declared "It is finished" (John 19:30) or not?

*I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, **then Christ died in vain.***
(Galatians 2:21)

*And **if by grace, then is it no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace: otherwise work is no longer work.***
(Romans 11:6)

Second, people who believe water baptism is necessary for salvation require two ways of salvation. Whether knowingly or ignorantly, they say in effect that there is one way of salvation in the Old Testament which was by faith alone (Romans 4:1-5), and another means in the New Testament which involves faith *plus* baptism. This would imply that under the dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:2) a person has to do more to be saved now than one did under the law. Does that sound like grace? What, again, do the Scriptures teach?

*And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved...**” (Acts 16:30-31)*

Third, when one assigns water baptism as a necessary part of salvation you then have to view numerous salvation verses as incomplete. You are forced now to read water baptism into many clear, uncomplicated salvation verses. For example, Romans 5:1 states,

*Therefore, **having been justified by faith,** we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

At this point you are then required to put your wet eye-glasses on and say in effect, “Yes, that is true. But you have to remember water baptism is needed as well.” So Romans 5:1

is not telling you the complete requirement for salvation. It is just telling you half the story.

Consider the following verses from the book of John and the sole condition for eternal life simply being faith in Christ alone.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16)*

***He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.** (John 3:36)*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and **believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.** (John 5:24)*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he **who believes in Me has everlasting life.** (John 6:47)*

With each verse you will need to say, “Ya, but...” You will have to put on a pair of water baptism glasses and every time you read one of those verses you have to mentally insert “plus baptism”. Otherwise, you will be misled. I appeal to you today, that when the Bible says it’s “through faith,” it means “through faith *alone*.” When it only says “believe,” it means “believe in Christ *alone*.”

A Personal Appeal

In answer to our first question, “Is water baptism necessary for salvation?”, the biblical answer is very clear. Absolutely

not! In fact, the Bible teaches that water baptism has NO PART in eternal salvation. This means tragically that hell will be filled with people who were baptized in water but who never put their trust in Christ alone. And while they may have attended a church regularly and every Sunday recited the Apostles Creed, at their funeral you will hear the minister say, “when so and so was baptized, they became a child of God.” But did they?

Dear Reader, you may be baptized by every church in your town so that you are water-logged from head to foot and yet still be destined for a Christ-less eternity in the Lake of Fire. Do you know for sure that you have eternal life? If you do not know for sure that you are going to heaven if you were to die today, why not settle it now? Transfer your faith from whatever you were trusting to save you (including your baptism), and put your trust in Jesus Christ alone who died for your sins and rose again!

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

*Behold, **now** is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)*

Question 2

WHAT DOES THE WORD BAPTISM MEAN?

Our English word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizō*. A transliteration differs from a translation, for

instead of giving a word an English equivalent, the translators merely carry over each of the Greek letters: βαπτίζω/*baptizō*.

***Baptizō* in Extra-Biblical Writings**

The Greek word *baptizō* was used in various contexts by various extra-biblical writers. For example, Xenophon in the 4th century B.C. tells of the Spartan soldiers dipping their spears into pigs' blood before going to battle. By identifying their spears with blood the nature of the spear was changed from a hunting to a warrior spear. This dipping into blood was referred to as *baptizō*, meaning "to put into, to identify with, to immerse."

Euripides in the 5th century B.C. used *baptizō* to describe a sinking ship. As it sinks, the ship is so "identified" or "baptized" or "immersed" with the water that it no longer floats.

Baptizō was also found in ancient Greek literature connected with the phrase "over head and ears in debt." This phrase also gives the idea of being completely identified, placed in union with, or submerged in debt.

Its Basic and Biblical Meaning

As the chart on page 22 will indicate, the word "baptize" has as its basic meaning, "to put or place into, to identify with, or to immerse." In itself, "baptism" is a dry word. When you read the word "baptize" or "baptism," wring it out in your mind. Though sometimes the context in which "baptism" is used relates to water, at other times it has nothing to do with H₂O. *The word itself requires no water.* Thus every time you run across it in the Bible, remember that it means "to put into, to identify with, or to immerse."

This biblical meaning and usage of baptize will be clearly demonstrated in the chart on page 22 as the Bible refers to four different kinds of baptisms that are completely dry yet real. You could liken this to the usage of the term “save” in the Bible. While the concept of “deliverance” is the thrust of the meaning of “save,” the context and usage may vary widely such as:

- physical deliverance (Psalm 3:7)
- spiritual deliverance from sin’s penalty (2 Timothy 1:9)
- spiritual deliverance from sin’s power (James 1:21)
- spiritual deliverance from sin’s presence (Romans 13:11)

In like manner, while the word “baptize” means “to put into, to identify with, or to immerse,” the context and usage may vary.

The proper interpretation of the Bible requires that we consider:

- the *context* of the passage
- the *content* of the verse
- the *comparison* of Scripture with other Scriptures.

Only then can a person arrive at correct scriptural conclusions on any subject or issue with balance and without bias.

Question 3

IS *WATER* BAPTISM THE ONLY KIND OF BAPTISM REFERRED TO IN THE BIBLE?

Perhaps to your surprise, the Bible speaks of *seven* different baptisms; four real, actual, dry baptisms; and three wet, symbolic, ritualistic baptisms. The following diagram is designed to identify each of these seven baptisms.

Please note that the word “baptism” in each case carries the idea of “identification with or place into”. The context determines the object identified with, while each specific baptism is unique from each the other.

In studying the Bible and “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), it is imperative that one pay careful attention to the context and usage of the word. Otherwise, a person will foist his own viewpoint, interpretation, and theology upon a passage, instead of drawing out its meaning, usage, and interpretation from its context and content. This has been a serious flaw in attempts at biblical interpretation that severely miss the mark of what God intended by the words of the original author to the audience of his day.

	SCRIPTURE	SUBJECT	SPHERE	RESULTS
BAPTISM	Baptism of Moses <i>1 Corinthians 10:2</i>	Israelites who fled from Egypt	<i>Cloud and Sea</i>	Identified with Moses (Sea) and the Lord (Cloud)
	Baptism of Cup <i>Matthew 20:22</i> <i>Luke 12:50</i>	Christ	<i>Suffering</i>	Christ identified with sins of mankind
	Baptism by Holy Spirit <i>Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3-4</i> <i>1 Cor. 12:13;</i> <i>Eph. 4:5; Gal. 3:26-28</i>	All church-age believers	<i>Body of Christ</i>	Believers identified with Christ as His body
D R Y / R E A L	Baptism of Fire <i>Matthew 3:11</i> <i>Matthew 13:25ff</i> <i>Luke 3:16b</i>	All unbelievers	<i>Judgment Fires</i>	Unbelievers identified with God's judgment
	Baptism of John <i>Matthew 3:1-11</i> <i>John 1:25-33</i> <i>Acts 19:2-4</i>	John's and Jesus' Disciples (Israelites)	<i>Kingdom</i>	Disciples of John's or Jesus' message of repentance— Kingdom message
W E T / R I T U A L	Baptism of Jesus <i>Matthew 3:13-17</i>	Jesus	<i>Will of the Father</i> <i>Resulting ultimately in the cross</i>	Personal identification with repentant remnant, national manifestation of Messiah to Israel, and divine coronation of the King
	Baptism of Church-age Believers <i>Acts 2:41; 8:26-40</i> <i>10:47-48; 18:8</i>	Obedient believers	<i>Public identification with Christ</i>	Public proclamation of salvation and identification with Christ and other believers

Question 4

SHOULD WE PRACTICE WATER BAPTISM TODAY?

The answer to that question is *yes!* I believe the Scriptures afford us at least three reasons why.

1. Water baptism was commanded to *Church-age believers*.

After Jesus Christ's death for our sins and bodily resurrection from the dead, He gave the following imperative to His disciples:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The reason for their "going" was to "preach the Gospel to every creature"(Mark 16:15). Upon hearing the Gospel and putting one's faith in Christ alone for eternal salvation, these disciples were to provide water baptism for these new Christians as a means of public testimony and identification with Jesus Christ, along with giving them important biblical instruction for their ongoing spiritual growth.

It is important to recognize that this ongoing "teaching" (Matthew 28:20) has at its backdrop the necessary "church truth" given by Jesus Christ to his disciples on the night before His crucifixion. This is recorded for us in John chapters 13-17 where such important church-age grace truths were communicated:

- humble service to others (John 13:1-7)
- practical cleansing for fellowship (John 13:8-10)
- the need to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34-35)
- the believer's home in Heaven (John 14:2)
- Christ's coming for believers (John 14:3)
- prayer to the Father in Christ's name (John 14:13-14)
- the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18)
- abiding by faith in Christ to bear fruit (John 15:1-8)
- the need to witness for Christ in spite of the world's hatred of Christ and believers (John 15:1-8)
- the Holy Spirit's conviction of the world (John 16:7-11)

No wonder the late Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, a champion of grace, wrote:

The upper room discourse (John 13-17) is the genesis of the Epistles of the New Testament; for in it, in germ form, the great doctrines of grace are announced. The phrase "my commandments" is reserved until this grace revelation, because this term refers to the teachings of grace, rather than to the law." (*Grace*, p. 94)

Thus, Jesus' instructions to be "teaching them to observe all things that I have commended you" is especially directed toward the church-age truths of the Upper Room Discourse, along with this "Great Commission" which includes the

on-going practice of water baptism for believers in Christ during this age.

This is why in Acts 10:42-43 we have a case where a God-fearing Gentile (Cornelius) heard the Gospel via the apostle Peter. Cornelius had been responding to the truth that he knew and God then gave him the Gospel.

*And He (Jesus Christ) commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him (Jesus Christ) **all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.***

Notice for a moment what is clearly missing as a condition for the forgiveness of sins. There is no mention of water baptism whatsoever. The sole and singular condition to receive the forgiveness of sin is to *believe in Jesus Christ*, period.

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the **Holy Spirit** **it fell** upon all those who heard the word. (Acts 10:44)*

While they were hearing the Gospel, the Holy Spirit was given to them. Why? Because *they believed* the truth about Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit is not given to unbelievers. But where does water baptism fit in?

*And those of the circumcision (the Jews that were with Peter) who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out on the Gentiles (and not the Jews only) also. (Acts 10:45)*

For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water,

*that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he **commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord**. Then they asked him to stay a few days. (Acts 10:46-48)*

Notice carefully the order. (1) They heard the Gospel; (2) they believed in Jesus Christ alone; (3) they received the Holy Spirit; and then (4) they were baptized into water. You must keep clear that order. This is extremely significant. Thus, historically, water baptism was commanded in Scripture to Church-age believers.³

2. Water baptism was practiced and perpetuated by the early church.

*Then **those who gladly received his word were baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (Acts 2:41)*

*But **when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized**. (Acts 8:12)*

*Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and **was baptized**. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. (Acts 9:18-19)*

*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed on the Lord** with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, **hearing, believed and were baptized**. (Acts 18:8)*

There are those ultra or hyper-dispensationalists who would say that water baptism is not for us today. But as one observes

³ Note also Acts 2:38 and 22:16.

the development of the Church, water baptism was practiced by Jewish believers (Acts 2:41), by Samaritan believers (Acts 8:12), by Gentile believers (Acts 10:48) and by the disciples of John (Acts 19:1-5) in the ministries of Peter, Philip, and Paul many years into the church-age. Though initially instituted in the church-age because of the “Great Commission” given by our Lord (Matthew 28:19-20),⁴ water baptism then became the normal practice for believers in Christ. This is further supported by such passages as 1 Corinthians 1:14-16 and 1 Peter 3:18-22. Nowhere do we see any verses that predict the cessation of water baptism (unlike 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 and Hebrews 2:3-4 regarding the sign-gifts); nor a passage that rescinds its practice. And though the significance of water baptism has been lessened or lost in many places in the West due to familiarity and misuse, there is no biblical reason to downplay it as not being God’s will or to discontinue its practice.⁵

3. Water baptism has a tremendous truth to proclaim.

Water baptism beautifully pictures one of the most significant truths for the Church-age believer. This is why I believe the mode of water baptism as taught in Scripture is that of immersion. Every passage where a believer’s baptism occurs either requires or allows for immersion. Why? Because it is necessary to proclaim “identification” truth via its means.

Furthermore, there is the Greek word *rhantizō*, translated in the Bible “sprinkling,” which could have been employed had the Holy Spirit wanted to have us understand baptism as

⁴ See Daniel B. Wallace’s comments in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (pp. 645).

⁵ The doctrinal statement of the Duluth Bible Church reads, “We believe in the ordinances of believer’s water baptism and the Lord’s Supper as scriptural means of testimony for the church age” (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

sprinkling. But *rhantizō* is not utilized because immersion fulfills the identification truth symbol best. By identification or position truth, I am referring to the biblical concept of the believer's spiritual union with Christ which occurs when he/she trusts in Christ. Consider the following verses that state this spiritual reality.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)

And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:10)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)

Question 5

WHAT DOES WATER BAPTISM IN THE AGE OF GRACE PICTURE OR PROCLAIM?

First of all, let me explain what water baptism does *not* do. Water baptism does not save, regenerate, give forgiveness of sins, or grant the Holy Spirit to the lost. Nor does it sanctify, make spiritual, or qualify the saved to serve the Lord, as no work or ritual can do this (Galatians 3:2-3). A godly walk and spiritual growth is all by God's grace appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy

Spirit (Colossians 2:6-7; Galatians 2:20; 3:3). Furthermore, water baptism is not necessary for church membership (for one cannot find official church membership in the Bible). Frankly, it is harder to become a member of some churches than it is to go to heaven!

So what does baptism in water proclaim? Water baptism *pictures* one's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. When believers go down into the water, they are symbolically picturing the fact that they have died with Christ; they have been buried with Christ; they have been risen with Christ; they are now a new creation in Christ; and they have believed that Christ died for their sins, was buried, and arose again.

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. (Romans 6:3-5)

Romans 6:3-5 sets forth the *reality* of every believer's union with Christ which is pictured through water baptism. Romans 6 is **not** dealing with water, but with the baptizing by means of the Holy Spirit. Notice, these Roman believers were said to have been "baptized *into Christ*" not into water!

This spiritual baptism into union with Christ was also true of the Galatian believers.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is

neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches us that the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit into union with Christ is true of all believers.

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)

Spirit baptism is one of the seven unities that all believers have in common.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

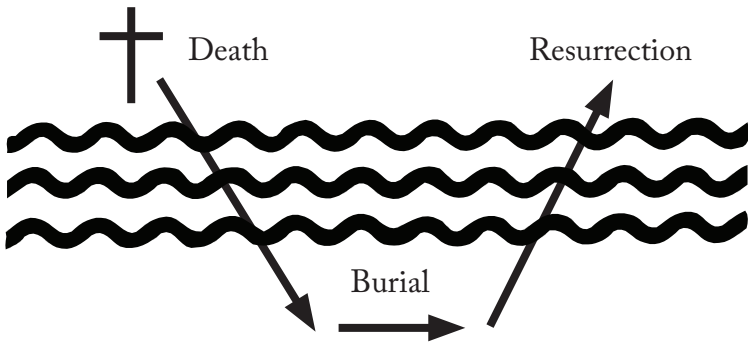
At water baptism, a believer in Christ publicly proclaims their faith and identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Furthermore, 1 Peter 3:18-21 indicates that the “like figure” of water baptism gives a believer the opportunity to publicly proclaim that she/he has a “good conscience” towards God. This is because they have been forgiven due to Christ’s death for their sins.

These tremendous “identification” truths are what water baptism pictures and proclaims. This biblical ritual does *not* do something for you. In fact, it is a visible symbol of the believer’s invisible union with Christ and what *He* has done *for* you. This is why when we have been involved in baptizing believers, *we* put them down into the water and then *we* pick them out of the water. Who does all the work? *We* do; those getting baptized simply trust us to do it. Is not this

just like what God does for us at salvation? What a wonderful picture.

Thus, water baptism in the Bible is only done *once* to genuine believers. Why? Because each believer is placed into Christ and identified in union with Him how many times? Once!

Water baptism then pictures the believer's identification with Christ. It is a means to proclaim that one has already been saved by God's grace and has a guilt free conscience before God as his/her sins have been forgiven through faith in Christ alone.



What Water Baptism Pictures and Proclaims

Question 6

ARE THERE ANY BIBLICAL CONDITIONS TO BE MET BEFORE SOMEONE SHOULD BE BAPTIZED BY WATER?

Condition 1: You must be a genuine believer in Jesus Christ who has been saved by God's grace.

Consider again Acts 18:8,

*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed on the Lord** with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, **hearing, believed and were baptized.***

Is this not the same order as we observed in Acts 10? They (1) heard the Gospel; (2) they believed in Christ alone; (3) they were forgiven by God; (4) they received the Holy Spirit; then they were baptized into water.

Condition number one is this: you must be a believer in Jesus Christ. You must be genuinely saved. Ritual without reality means nothing.

Since this is true, it should not surprise us to find *no* mention or examples of infant baptism anywhere in Scripture. Why? Because babies can not believe in Jesus Christ. I have whispered John 3:16 into the ears of my three children as babies, yet not one of them responded "AMEN."

Condition 2: You should understand what you are doing.

A second implied condition to water baptism is you must understand what you are doing. Otherwise, it is an empty

ritual, meaning nothing to you or anyone else. And until a believer desires to participate in this divinely designed privilege to publicly identify with Jesus Christ and understands the purpose and picture of water baptism, it would be foolish and unwise to participate in it. Thus, in the local church I am privileged to pastor, I seek to pressure no one to be baptized by water. Instead, my encouragement to every new and old believer alike is to allow the Holy Spirit to transform their thinking via learning the Word of God (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). Nor do I teach that a believer is carnal if he/she has not yet been baptized. I have even encouraged a believer or two to wait on being baptized when they were yet unsettled in their hearts regarding this. But as each believer at whatever stage of spiritual growth comes to understand any issue of Scripture, he/she is encouraged to respond by faith (in light of God's grace) as unto the Lord (Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:23). Otherwise, ignorant compliance or legalistic thinking results in ritualistic performance; instead of Spirit-directed and joyful obedience to Jesus Christ by faith.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6)

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
(Romans 12:1-2)

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. (1 Peter 2:2)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. (Colossians 3:23)

Question 7

WHAT HINDERS YOU AS A BELIEVER FROM GETTING BAPTIZED?

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shear-er is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."

*So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. **What hinders me from being baptized?**"* (Acts 8:26-36)

The Ethiopian eunuch probably asked this question because he had been at Jerusalem and had seen Christians getting baptized into water. Since Philip had explained that Isaiah 53 (the passage the eunuch was reading) was fulfilled in the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the eunuch asks,

*See, here is water. **What hinders me from being baptized?***
(Acts 8:36)

What was the evangelist's reply?

Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." (Acts 8:37)

In other words, there is nothing hindering you *if you believe*. So how did the eunuch respond?

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (Acts 8:37)

Having met the sole biblical condition for salvation (as the eunuch placed his faith in Jesus Christ as Savior), the passage then reads,

*So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And **both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.** Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that*

the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:38-39)

So dear believer in Christ, perhaps you are asking yourself the same question that this eunuch did:

“What hinders me from being baptized?”(Acts 8:36)

And like Phillip said years ago, the answer today would be the same:

“If you believe with all your heart, you may.”(Acts 8:37)

What a great privilege it is to give a public proclamation to others of your faith in and identification with your great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, via water baptism. As Jesus announced regarding humble service to others,

*“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”
(John 13:17)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dennis Rokser (M.Div., D.Min., Grace Biblical Seminary) pastored Duluth Bible Church from 1985-2022. The focus of his teaching has been the Gospel of God's grace as it relates to salvation, eternal security, the believer's identification/position in Christ, and living by grace through faith-resting in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)