

# THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

(by George Battey)

This present study revolves around the purpose of baptism. The issues discussed here are not:

- *How baptism is to be performed?* (sprinkle / immerse)
- *Who should be baptized?* (babies / adults)
- *What formula should be spoken?*
- *Who is qualified to administer baptism?*

These are subjects for other studies in the future. This present study will focus on the purpose of baptism: *Why should men be baptized?*

## BASIS – OCCASION

Let's begin with a question:

**Q:** *On what basis is a man's sins actually forgiven?*

The actual basis of salvation is the blood of Christ.

*Matthew 26:27-28* (NKJV)

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,  
"Drink from it, all of you.

28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

So the blood of Christ is the basis of man's salvation. Most probably agree on this.

**Q:** *When does His blood actually cleanse us?* Does the sinner have to do anything on his part in order for the blood of Christ to be applied to his life?

1) **Some believe man does nothing whatsoever – it is WHOLLY UP TO GOD.**

This is Calvinism.

Under this system God arbitrarily predestines some men to heaven and He alone chooses who shall be saved by the blood of Jesus and everyone else will be eternally lost.

Calvinists are often heard to say: Men are saved by *the grace of God alone*. They cite this passage:

*Ephesians 2:8* (NKJV)

*8 For **by grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

Obviously the grace of God is involved, but man is not saved by grace only – for if it were grace only, all men would be saved:

*Titus 2:11* (NKJV)

*11 For **the grace of God** that brings salvation **has appeared to all men,***

Here is the “grace of God,” but not some general-type of grace – it’s the grace “*that brings salvation*” and it has “*appeared to all men.*”

So if grace alone saves a man, all men would be saved and we know that’s not true (Mt 7:13).

2) **Some think the blood is applied at the point of BELIEF (faith).**

It is true that faith is involved in man’s salvation:

*Ephesians 2:8* (NKJV)

*8 For by grace you have been saved **through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

But if the blood of Jesus is applied to a sinner’s life at the point of faith only, we encounter problems:

John 12:42-43 (NKJV)

42 Nevertheless even **among the rulers many believed in Him**, but because of the Pharisees **they did not confess Him**, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;

43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

If the blood is applied the very moment one believes in Christ, then these men were saved. But they refused to confess Christ and were lost even though they believed (cf. Mt 10:33).

So the blood of Christ is not applied at the point of belief.

As important as faith is, faith alone cannot save a sinner:

James 2:24 (NKJV)

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not by faith only**.

This is the only occurrence of “*faith only*” in the Bible and we are specifically told man is not justified by “faith only.”

### **3) Some think the blood is applied at the point of PRAYER.**

The Faith Independent Baptist Church in McDonough, Georgia distributes a tract entitled, “*God’s Simple Plan of Salvation.*” In this tract Rom 10:13 is printed:

Romans 10:13 (NKJV)

13 For “*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*”

This tract interprets “*calling on the name of the Lord*” to mean “pray” – for they write this:

*Just pray: “Oh, God, I know I am a sinner. I believe Jesus was my substitute when He died on the Cross. I believe His shed blood, death, burial, and resurrection were for me. I now receive Him as my Savior. I thank You for the forgiveness of my sins, the gift of salvation and everlasting life, because of Your merciful grace. Amen.”*

This is very typical of so many churches and preachers. Billy Graham, “*The Nation’s Pastor*” (as he is called), teaches this. These people believe prayer is the point when the blood of Christ is applied.

But if this is so, we encounter more difficulties:

*Acts 9* (NKJV)

3 As [Saul] journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” ...

Here we see Saul believing in Christ – but he’s not saved at the point of belief.

He asks what he the Lord wants him to “**do.**”

6 ... Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told **what you must do.**”

The Lord did not say: “There’s nothing for you to do – I’ve done it all on the cross for you and you’re already saved – don’t you know that?”

He’s told to go into the city and he will be told what he “**must do.**” “Must” means **absolutely essential.**

7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and **neither ate nor drank.**

He did not eat or drink for three days. That means he’s repenting – he’s sorry for what he has done and he’s resolved to change his life.

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

11 So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, **he is praying**."

Saul believes in Jesus, has repented, and is fasting and praying, but he's still lost in his sins. So praying was not the point the blood of Christ was applied.

**Q:** What did the preacher tell Saul that he must do in order to be saved?

*Acts 22:16 (NKJV)*

16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and **be baptized**, and wash away your sins, **calling on the name of the Lord.**

From this we learn that one "calls on the name of the Lord" – not by praying, for Saul was already doing that – but by being baptized.

This brings us to baptism:

4) **The Bible teaches the blood of Christ is applied at the point of BAPTISM.**

Listen carefully: **Baptism is not the basis of salvation – the blood of Christ is the basis. But baptism is THE OCCASION when the blood is applied.**

*Ephesians 1:3 (NKJV)*

3 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,

Listen to that. "Every spiritual blessing" is "in Christ." Again:

*Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)*

7 **In Him** we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

“In Christ” there is “redemption thru His blood.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

17 Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Look at how important it is to be “in Christ.”

**Q:** How do we get “into Christ”?

Galatians 3:27 (NKJV)

27 For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.

Men do not get “into Christ” by:

- Faith only.
- By saying the sinner’s prayer.
- By the grace of God alone.

**Men get into Christ by being baptized into Christ.**

**Repeat:** The blood of Christ is the basis of salvation, but baptism is the occasion when the blood is applied.

Romans 6:3-4 (NKJV)

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we were **buried with Him through baptism into death**, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life**.

Jesus shed His blood when He died. Men are baptized into the death of Christ. Baptism is **not the basis** of salvation, but it is the **occasion** when the blood of Christ is applied to a sinner’s life.

Baptism is the beginning of a “new life” (v4). This fits exactly with what Jesus taught:

John 3 (NKJV)

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Being “born again” involves water in some way. But what did we just learn in Rom 6:4? We learned that:

- When we are baptized, we are baptized into the **death of Christ**.
- We come up out of the water to live a **new life**.

Rom 6:4 helps us understand Jesus was speaking about baptism in Jn 3:5. Since He was speaking about baptism, we learn that no one can go to heaven without being baptized.

(**NOTE**: The “thief on the cross” will be discussed momentarily.)

Romans 6:5-6 (NKJV)

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

6 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**.

Look at v5: “***if we have been united together in the likeness of His death.***”

**Q**: How do we become “united together in the likeness of His death”?

By being baptized (vv3-4). Look at the results of baptism:

- *Our old man is crucified with Him.*
- *The body of sin is “done away with.”*
- *We are no longer slaves of sin.*

1 Peter 3:20-21 (KJV)

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, **eight souls were saved by water.**

21 The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Here we are told plainly that Noah's family was saved "by water."

The salvation of Noah by water was a foreshadow of men being saved by water under the NT age.

Verse 21 plainly states: "**Baptism doth also now save us.**"

We are also plainly told that baptism is not for fleshly defilement.

In the OT various washings were performed in the temple (cf. Heb 9:10) because of fleshly defilement (e.g. defilement that comes from touching a dead body – Num 19:14-19; Ex 30:19-21; Lev 11:25).

Baptism is not for such fleshly defilement.

Baptism is the "*answer of a good conscience toward God*" – i.e. the sinner has a clear conscience now because he is forgiven at the point of baptism.

## WORKS

Many reject baptism because they say it is a "work" and the scripture says plainly:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 **not of works**, lest anyone should boast.



So people do 3 things here:

- a) *They read this anti-works passage.*
- b) *They label baptism as a “work.”*
- c) *And then conclude that baptism is actually harmful.*

But this is a dangerous conclusion:

James 2:24 (NKJV)

*24 You see then that a man is **justified by works**, and not by faith only.*

In some way “works” do play a part in a man’s justification.

Both James and Paul were inspired. Both are speaking the truth. Yet how can both be correct at the same time?

The solution: ***These men are writing about two different kinds of works:***

- a) **Works of merit** – these are works which men do with an arrogant attitude. They think they are somehow deserving of salvation because they have done something.
- b) **Works of humble obedience** – these are works which God has commanded men do but with a humble attitude.

**Q:** What’s the difference between *works of merit* (which cannot save) and *works of obedience* (which are necessary for salvation)?

**R:** The only difference is **attitude**. How one thinks (his attitude) makes all the difference.

Luke 18:9 (NKJV)

*9 Also He spoke this parable to some who **trusted in themselves** that they were righteous, and despised others:*

Just the thought condemned this Pharisee. In contrast, Jesus said:

*Luke 17:10* (NKJV)

*10 So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'*"

***Here is a humble attitude.*** Obeying “all those things which are commanded” but having a humble attitude.

There is something wrong with a theology that says: “*Obedience to God’s commands are not necessary.*”

*1 John 2:3-5* (NKJV)

*3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

*4 He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

*5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

Baptism is one of the commands of God.

We are not free to say: “*It’s a nice command, but it’s not absolutely essential.*”

**SUMMARY:** We have seen that there are three things involved in man’s salvation:

- *The grace of God*
- *The faith of man*
- *Works of humble obedience – which includes baptism*

## TWO KINDS OF BAPTISM

Let's focus more closely now on baptism and notice two different kinds of baptism mentioned in the NT:

### 1) Water baptism

Water baptism was always by immersion and always performed upon believing adults.

Mark 1:8 (NKJV)

8 [John said] "I indeed **baptized you with water**, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The purpose for water baptism, according to the scriptures, was always for the forgiveness of sins:

Mark 1:4 (NKJV)

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance **for the remission of sins**. ↓↓

εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν

Luke 3:3 (NKJV)

3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance **for the remission of sins**, ↓↓

εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ↓↓

εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν

**"for the remission of sins"** – the wording in all of these passages is identical in both Greek and English.

This identical expression is also found in:

Matthew 26:27-28 (NKJV)

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,  
“Drink from it, all of you.

28 For this is **My blood** of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. ↓↓

εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν

**NOTE:** The purpose for water baptism is exactly the same as the purpose for which Jesus shed His blood.

- *His blood was not shed because sins were already forgiven.*
- *Instead, His blood was shed in order that sins might be forgiven.*

Likewise:

- *Water baptism is not because sins are already forgiven.*
- *Rather, baptism is in order that sins might be forgiven.*

Listen carefully: Acts 2:38 says we must be baptized “*for the remission of sins.*” This passage tells not only commands baptism, but it also specifies the purpose for being baptized.

If someone is baptized for any other reason – they’re not baptized in the sight of God – the blood of Jesus has not been applied to his life.

- People who were taught salvation comes at the point of ***faith only*** are not being baptized “*for the remission of sins*” because they thought their sins were forgiven before they were baptized.
- People who were taught to say the “***sinner’s prayer***” were not baptized “*for the remission of sins.*”

These people need to submit to the Lord’s command to be baptized “*for the remission of sins.*”

## 2) Holy Spirit baptism

In this baptism, people were immersed into (overwhelmed with) the power of the Holy Spirit and were able to work miracles.

*Mark 1:8 (NKJV)*

*8 [John said] "I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

The purpose of Holy Spirit baptism was to empower men to work miracles not to save them from their sins. Notice:

*Acts 1:4-5 (NKJV)*

*4 And being assembled together with [the apostles], [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;*

*5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

These apostles were already saved here.

**Q:** If they were already saved, what was the purpose of Holy Spirit baptism?

*Acts 1:8 (NKJV)*

*8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

Holy Spirit baptism did not save them, but rather it empowered them. It gave them the ability to work miracles.

**Q:** Why did they need the ability to work miracles?

**R:** Because they were going to be witnesses of the Lord's resurrection. They needed some way of verifying and confirming their testimony.

*Mark 16:20* (NKJV)

*20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word through the accompanying signs.***

**Repeat:** Holy Spirit baptism was not for salvation of the soul, but for confirmation of the word.

*Acts 2:38* (NKJV)

*38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***

**NOTE:** The “gift of the Holy Spirit” came after the remission of sins.

**Repeat:** Holy Spirit baptism was not for salvation of the soul, but for confirmation of the word.

## PREREQUISITES

The scriptures do not teach that water baptism alone saves a sinner. There are *prerequisites*.

### 1) Belief (faith)

*Mark 16:16* (NKJV)

*16 He who **believes and is baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

### 2) Repentance

*Acts 2:38* (NKJV)

*38 Then Peter said to them, “**Repent**, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; ...*

### 3) Confession

*Acts 8:35-38 (NKJV)*

*35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.*

Notice, the preacher simply preached “Jesus” to him.

*36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”*

Preaching Jesus includes preaching baptism for after “preaching Jesus” the eunuch asked, “Here is water; what hinders me from being baptized?”

If a preacher “preaches Jesus” and the sinner leaves without knowing he must be baptized, that preacher didn’t “preach Jesus” like Philip did.

*37 Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

*38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*

Before the sinner could be baptized, he had to believe first. But the only way the preacher could know if the sinner believed is for the sinner to confess his belief.

**SUMMARY:** There are three prerequisites: belief, repentance, confession of belief. Only **after** meeting these conditions is a person qualified to be baptized.

## THIEF ON THE CROSS

What about the thief on the cross? Was he saved? Why didn't he have to get baptized?

**It's an assumption to say he was not baptized.**

Many people were baptized by John:

*Matthew 3:5 (NKJV)*

*5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*

And many fell away after they were baptized (Jn 6:66).

The point is, we just don't have enough information about this thief to draw any conclusion one way or the other. However, we do know for a fact that the thief lived, was saved and died under the OT dispensation. The NT command requiring all men to be baptized came after Jesus resurrected from His own death (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38).

*Hebrews 9:16-17 (NKJV)*

*16 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.*

*17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.*

The NT command for baptism was not "in force" until after the death of Christ Himself. The thief was saved before the NT came into force.



## CONCLUSION

What have we learned? We have seen:

- *The blood of Christ is the basis of man's salvation.*
- *Grace is important, but grace alone will not save anyone.*
- *Faith is necessary, but faith alone will not save anyone.*
- *Prayer is important, but no sinner in the Bible was told to say the "sinner's prayer" in order to be saved.*
- *Baptism is the point at which the blood of Christ is applied to a sinner.*
- *Baptism must be preceded by faith, repentance, and confession.*

In closing notice this final passage:

*Hebrews 5:8-9* (NKJV)

*8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

*9 And having been perfected, **He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.***

# THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the actual **basis** of man's salvation?
- 2) How many times does the phrase "faith only" occur in the scriptures?
- 3) According to the Bible, how does one "call on the name of the Lord" – by prayer or by baptism?
- 4) According to the Bible, where is "every spiritual blessing" to be found?
- 5) The OT required "various washings" to be performed in the temple courtyard. What was the purpose of these washings?
- 6) What is the difference between "*works of merit*" and "*works of humble obedience*"?
- 7) Did Jesus shed His blood because sins were already forgiven or did He shed His blood in order that sins might be forgiven?
- 8) Is Holy Spirit baptism necessary for salvation?