

Salvation

There are many different groups that claim to use the Bible for their definition of salvation and yet come up with different conclusions as to how we are saved. Most agree that we have a problem and that we need to be saved, but there is disagreement as to what that problem is and how we are saved from it. Let's look at what the Bible really teaches.

What Are We Saved From?

We are saved from sin (Matthew 1:21). Our problem is our sin because God is holy and will not allow any unholiness to come into His kingdom and presence. Habakkuk 1:13 says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing." That is serious and we must take God seriously as well as our sinful lives. Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are saved from sin. Some people think we are saved from God's wrath which is eternal punishment in hell. This is true. Romans 5:9 says, "Since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath." We are saved from the penalty of sin, but that is not all - we are saved from sin. Some people will supposedly accept Jesus as a kind of fire insurance - "Yeah I'll trust Jesus to make sure I don't go to hell." They have no intentions of getting rid of their sin; they just don't want to go to hell; this is not true salvation. We are saved from the penalty of sin and we are saved from the power of sin (Romans 6) and we will eventually be saved from the presence of sin either when we die or when Jesus returns whichever comes first. Those who claim that they accept Jesus as savior but not as Lord do not understand what they need to be saved from. This is why true repentance is necessary for salvation. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Wayne Grudem defines repentance as follows: "Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ." We must want to be saved from sin before we can be saved from sin. We must feel sorrow over our sin (not just that we have been caught) and truly desire to be rid of sin in our lives. For someone to say they want to be saved but they don't want to give up their sin is like holding onto a snake, clutching it without any intentions of letting it go and yet yelling "Help, save me from this snake."

When the Bible talks about salvation it can be confusing because it uses this term in three different senses. In one sense we are already saved (Ephesians 2:8); in another sense we are being saved (2 Corinthians 2:15; Philippians 2:12); and in another sense we will be saved (1 Peter 1:5). This is because the term salvation is a broad term including justification, sanctification and glorification. Justification is a legal term meaning we are declared not guilty by God (Romans 3 and 4). Sanctification is the process of our being made holy after we are justified by God. Hebrews 10:14 brings out both of these aspects when it says, "For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are sanctified." In one sense we are already made perfect - that is justification. In God's eyes we are perfect because of the powerful blood of Jesus which cleanses all of our sin. But in another sense, we all must admit we still sin (1 John 1:8) and need help by God to be holy - we are "sanctified" or as the NIV translates it, "being made holy" - it is a process that takes all of our lives (Philippians 3:12). In one sense God has declared us righteous and, in another sense, we are being made what he has declared us to be. Glorification is the state of perfection we arrive at when we get to heaven.

When we hear the term "salvation" most people think of justification because this is how the term is used most often in the Bible. How can we be justified by a holy God who cannot look on or tolerate sin when we are so guilty? It is because of the work of Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection brought our salvation. Jesus paid the price we were supposed to pay for our sin by dying on the cross and suffering God's wrath in our place. It is not that God just decided to overlook our sin - that would be unjust. He announced the penalty and then paid it Himself. Jesus suffered the wrath of God while on the cross; that is why he cried out "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus took our sins upon Himself and because of this God turned His back on Jesus and allowed Him to suffer the wrath we were supposed to suffer. This is how God could be just and yet justify those who place their faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). Romans 3:28 says, "For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." God's requirement is faith alone. Romans 4:5 says, "But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, his faith is credited for righteousness." We are declared righteous by our faith in Jesus and what He did for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift - not from works, so that no one can boast." Our trust in Jesus is the only thing that saves us. Our works have nothing to do with our being justified. This is how powerful the death of Jesus is. We cannot add anything to the finished work of Jesus on the cross. In fact when we say we are saved by faith plus being good, performing certain rituals, etc. we insult Jesus and are really saying his death on the cross wasn't good enough.

Faith Alone

We are saved from sin by faith alone. Now you might say, "But I thought you said we are saved by repentance?" They are really two sides to the same coin. Faith naturally includes repentance. You can't put your trust in Jesus to save you from your sin unless you want to be saved from your sin, which is repentance. We also must surrender to Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10). Romans 10:9 says we must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord; this does not mean we simply mouthed these words; otherwise, a parrot could get saved. It means we surrender to Jesus as our Lord and Master. This is not a separate thing we are supposed to do to be saved. Some people have lists of things you do to be saved. There are no lists in the Bible. One church has four things you are supposed to do to be saved when there is no single passage in the Bible that includes all four of these things. Salvation is the most important thing we should be concerned with and the Bible was written so that we could know how to be saved and yet it doesn't include this supposed list of four things to do to be saved? Obviously, there is another answer. Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me", meaning we must surrender to him as Lord (Matthew 16:24 see also Luke 14:25-33). Surrender is also just a part of faith. When I say I trust in Jesus I am saying I no longer trust in myself. I realize I have blown it and cannot save myself. I am handing over the steering wheel of my life to Jesus saying "here, I recognize I can't drive but I know You can." Surrender is not a work unless when you say "I must surrender" you mean I have to obey God to be saved - that would be works salvation. Repentance is not a work either unless when you say "I must repent" you mean I have to stop sinning to get saved. This would be silly. You would be saying I have to stop sinning in order to get the power to stop sinning. Surrender and repentance are an attitude, a desire - a part of real faith. The Greek word for repentance is

metanoia which literally means a change of mind (meta = change or after; noia = mind). It is a change of mind "I don't want to sin anymore" not a change of action "I stopped sinning." In other words, you don't get cleaned up in order to take a bath - you come as you are with a desire to be clean. It is a matter of the heart: I feel bad about my sin, I wish I would not have sinned, and I don't want to sin anymore. Now true repentance will lead to a changed life because when we get saved, we get the Holy Spirit in our life. The Holy Spirit's job is to make us holy (and He is really good at it too). This is why the person who says he is saved and yet there is no change in his life is only fooling himself. We are born again (John 3:3); we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); and the Holy Spirit is in us (Romans 8:9). This is what James meant when he said in 2:17, "In the same way faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead by itself." True faith will naturally lead to good works. But we are not saved by our works; we work because we are saved. Grace and works are the exact opposite of each other. Romans 11:6 says, "Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise, grace ceases to be grace." Grace means unmerited favor. We are saved by grace (we cannot merit our salvation at all), through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) apart from works (Romans 3:28;4:5), which will naturally lead to a changed life (Ephesians 2:10).

Can We Lose Our Salvation?

We are saved by faith and we stay saved by faith (Galatians 3:1-14). Some people say we are saved by faith but when we sin, we lose our salvation. This is a form of works salvation - you keep your salvation by your performance. This is a tragic belief for two reasons: 1) You could never be assured of your salvation. You would always live in fear wondering if you were going to make it, wondering if Jesus might come back while you are sinning at some time. 1 John 5:13 says, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." God wants us to know we are saved. We are not born again and then unborn again every time we sin (that could give you a spiritual headache). Some have a variation of this belief by saying that you don't lose your salvation every time you sin but if you sin a lot, you could lose your salvation. Well how many times does it take? In God's eyes all sin is equally rotten and worthy of eternal punishment (James 2:10). The Bible certainly doesn't say how many sins it takes to lose your salvation so if this is true, we could never be assured of our salvation, especially when we consider that our hearts are still sinful even after salvation. There are things in our lives that God hasn't even dealt with us about yet. As we mature in the Lord, He continues to reveal areas we need to work on. I don't know how many areas God hasn't dealt with me yet and so there could be enough sin in my life for me to lose my salvation for all I know. Thank God we don't lose our salvation because of sin. 2) This is a faulty view of God. When God forgives us, He doesn't stop there. He takes off His judge robe and throws away His gavel. Then He goes over to the other side of the courthouse and signs the adoption papers declaring us to be His child (1 John 3:1; Ephesians 1:5). To think of an earthly father that was willing to totally reject his son for disobedience is horrible, but to think this way of our eternal Father is blasphemy. God loves us with an eternal love. He does punish us when we sin (Hebrews 12:5-11), but this is as a father punishing his son for his own good not a judge punishing a criminal. The view that we lose our salvation when we sin and will go to hell unless we repent is the view that God never becomes our Father but always remains our judge. Some believe you lose your salvation if you completely lose your faith. This position is

not as bad as the others because it is not works salvation, but it still misunderstands what happens when we are really saved.

The fact is the Bible teaches that once we are saved God helps us to persevere unto the end and so we won't ever lose our salvation. John 6:39 says, "This is the will of Him who sent Me: that I should lose none of those He has given me but should raise them up on the last day." God won't lose even one of His children. John 10:27-28 says, "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish – ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand." This verse says that not even the devil can take us or lure us away from the Father. It also says, "they will never perish." If one child perishes then Jesus is a liar. The fact is that we can trust Jesus' word - we will never perish. Romans 8:29-30 says:

For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.

This verse says that the people God knew or fore-loved were predestined by God to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus. In other words, God determined that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). There is no doubt they will be saved because He has predestined that they will be conformed into the likeness of Jesus. God will make sure we don't fall away. That is why Jude 24 says God keeps us from falling. He does this by changing our hearts, putting new desires in us and coming to live inside us to make sure we don't fall (Ezekiel 36:25-27). The passage in Romans 8 says that those who are predestined are called, justified, and glorified. The term *glorified* is in the past tense even though it doesn't take place until the future to show how absolutely certain it is that everyone who is justified will be glorified. You can't get unpredestined, unglorified or unborn-again. Romans 8:38-39 continue this teaching that once we are saved, we cannot lose our salvation:

For I am persuaded that not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Paul goes out of his way to show that absolutely nothing can separate us from God once we are united to Him. Some say that we can voluntarily leave God by renouncing our faith. This verse says nothing in all creation can separate us from Him. We are in creation, so this verse applies to us as well. Paul didn't forget. We don't need to put at the end of this verse "Oh yeah, we can separate ourselves." This is true because God won't let us go. Once we are saved, we are no longer slaves to sin. Instead, we have become slaves to God (Romans 6:22) and are now owned by God (1 Peter 2:9). This does not mean that someone can supposedly believe in Jesus and then abandon Him and yet still claim to be saved. The Bible says we will persevere. Hebrews 3:14 says, "For we have become companions of the Messiah if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start." In other words, if we don't persevere in faith, it proves we never became companions of the Messiah, we never came to share in Christ (NIV). 1 John 2:19 teaches the same thing: "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us." The very fact that someone leaves proves they never belonged. True Christians will continue to produce fruit and will continue to trust in Jesus

because of the dramatic change God brought about. It is all up to God. If my salvation depended on me to hold onto it, I would lose it. I thank God it is up to Him not me. This is the remarkable change that takes place when we are saved from our sins. That is why it is called "eternal life" (Romans 6:23). To be eternal it would have to last forever otherwise it was never eternal.

You may ask, "But what about the warning passages in the Bible?" Some passages seem to teach that we can lose our salvation. All of these passages fall into one of three categories, but before we discuss these categories let's understand what the implications are. The passages we just went over clearly teach we cannot lose our salvation. If other passages teach we can lose our salvation, then the Bible contradicts itself - this is not an option for Christians (2 Peter 3:16-17). Since the passages that teach we cannot lose our salvation are so clear, there must be an explanation for the other passages. If we look closely at these passages, we discover there is an explanation that fits perfectly with the other passages and we see both the need for the assurance passages as well as the need for the warning passages.

The warning passages fall into one of three categories: 1) They could be Old Testament passages that no longer apply under the New Covenant. The Holy Spirit left Saul (1 Samuel 16:14); David prayed that the Holy Spirit would not leave him (Psalm 51:11). Under the Old Covenant there was no assurance of salvation unless there was continual repentance (Ezekiel 18:21-24). They were saved by grace, but they maintained their salvation through repentance and the provision of the sacrificial system. This is why God replaced the Old Covenant - it didn't guarantee salvation and it didn't make people perfect whereas the New Covenant does guarantee salvation and does completely justify us because the sacrifice of Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice to end all sacrifices (see Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:1-14). Therefore, Old Testament passages do not prove that we can lose our salvation.

2 and 3) The passages could be either legitimate warnings to Christians or they are warnings to those who have embraced Christianity but have not actually entered the family of God yet. The warnings could be to Christians and are either not referring to the loss of salvation but just referring to the loss of God's blessing or they are warnings of the loss of salvation but the warnings themselves are one of God's ways to ensure that none will perish. Hebrews 6:1-9 is a case in point for those who have not been saved yet. In this passage it describes people that have embraced Christianity to a certain extent and have even experienced the power of the Spirit in their lives, but it is clear that they never were Christians. The passage uses the illustration of a fruitless field (7-8) which is proof that they never were Christians because all Christians will produce fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). In the passage just referred to in Matthew it goes on to describe people that were actually used by God to perform miracles and cast out demons (21-23) but Jesus says about them, "I never knew you." He does not say, "I once knew you, but you lost your salvation;" He says, "I never knew you." They were never Christians just like the ones described in Hebrews 6 - we know this by the way the writer of Hebrews concludes this section in Hebrews 6:9: "Even though we are speaking this way, dear friends, in your case we are confident of the better things connected with salvation." Those who have salvation will produce good fruit and will not lose their salvation. It is amazing that some will use this passage to prove you can lose your salvation and then gain it back again because this passage says in verse 6 that they can't come back if they fall away. The fact is that it is referring to non-Christians who, like the Pharisees, blaspheme the Spirit (Mark 3:20-30) which is the only unpardonable sin (notice it is the Pharisees that were not saved whom Jesus accuses of committing this sin in Mark 3:30). Hebrews 10:26-39 is another example. The only ones that will experience God's wrath are "the

enemies of God" (27). We as Christians are to take warning by this passage because our God is a consuming fire. We as Christians will experience a judgment of our works and if they don't measure up they will be consumed and our lives will prove to be next to worthless (1 Corinthians 3:10-15), but as this passage in 1 Corinthians concludes: "If anyone's work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire." This is also how Hebrews 10:26-39 concludes: "But we are not those who draw back and are destroyed, but those who have faith and obtain life." If you are truly a Christian, you will persevere and will not shrink back - that is the fruit of true salvation. As Hebrews 3:14 says, "For we have become companions of the Messiah if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start."

The truth that once we are truly saved we cannot lose our salvation is a tremendous blessing. We no longer have to fear eternal punishment. Now we can serve God just because we love Him, not because we don't want to go to hell. This is the only way our works can truly be unselfish. Some religions work hard obeying commands, knocking on doors to witness, etc. but it is all selfishly motivated - they are doing it, at least partially, for their own benefit. True Christians that rest in God's eternal security can serve God completely out of love and gratitude. We can also wholeheartedly serve Him even risking our life because we know He holds us in the palm of His hand. We can truly say with Paul, "For Christ's *love* compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Baptism

Now that we have considered the doctrine of salvation, three questions remain, "How do I get saved?", "What about baptism?", and "How can I be sure I am saved?" First let's talk about baptism.

The noun and verb forms for baptism are used over 100 times in the New Testament. John the Baptist brought a baptism of repentance to Israel, which was an affront to the Pharisees because they didn't feel they needed it. But John was prophesied about beforehand, and his ministry was absolutely vital to prepare people for the coming of Christ. Jesus was baptized by John and started baptizing converts Himself through His apostles. I say all this to bring to your attention the importance of baptism. It is not an afterthought of the Christian. It is not a minor issue. The New Testament church did not even consider the possibility of getting saved and not getting baptized; in fact, baptism was the normal outward expression of faith (not walking an isle or saying a prayer). Let's look at some important passages on baptism and see what they reveal about baptism. Some specific questions we want to answer are: "Does baptism save you?" "When do I get baptized?" "Why is baptism important?"

Does Baptism Save You?

First let's answer the question, "Does baptism save you?" This is a very important question. There are several different beliefs in the church concerning baptism and whether it saves you or not. Some believe in baptismal regeneration; this is the belief that baptism regenerates us; at our baptism we are born again. Lutherans and Catholics believe in baptismal regeneration. The Church of Christ believes in something similar to this view; they believe that baptism is the act of faith that brings salvation. None of these groups believe baptism is a work. Catholicism seems to believe there is something magical about the baptism itself; even apart from faith the baptism cleanses the person from original sin (*ex opera operato*). Lutherans believe the parents need to have faith before it is affective, but the baby does not need faith. The

Church of Christ believes the recipient must have faith; otherwise, the baptism is just a bath. Baptists reject baptismal regeneration and state that baptism is an act of obedience; it is a picture of salvation but does not bring salvation. Sometimes in their zeal to counter baptismal regenerationists, they speak of baptism as an option that you can decide to participate in when you feel like it; Baptist theologians would never sanction this caricature of baptism. I believe that the doctrine of baptism is not a doctrine worth dividing over; in other words, we can agree to disagree agreeably on our beliefs concerning baptism. But I do believe it is very important, and false beliefs can have adverse affects on our lives. God didn't talk about baptism over 100 times and institute it as one of the two ordinances of the church for nothing. We want to get this doctrine right and the only way that is possible is to come to the Scriptures to see what they reveal without letting our preconceived ideas and cultural background get in the way.

In Acts 2:37 it says, "When they heard this, they came under deep conviction and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: 'Brothers, what must we do?' 'Repent,' Peter said to them, 'and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" Baptism is not an option. Notice the people did not ask "What must we do to be justified?" or "What are the steps of salvation?" They just said, "What must we do?" Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." Repentance is one aspect of true faith in Jesus, which is what Peter was discussing with them when they were cut to the heart (NIV). Baptism is our declaration to the world that we have decided to follow Jesus. It is the first work of a Christian, the first act of obedience according to Matthew 28:19: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The repentance as a part of true faith brings the forgiveness of sins, not the ritual of baptism, but baptism is essential to our Christian walk. Jesus could say in Mark 16:16 "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." The Bible doesn't even consider the possibility of a person getting saved and not baptized, but it is the belief that saves not the baptism, which is why he didn't say "but whoever does not believe *or is not baptized* will be condemned." If Baptism was essential for our justification Paul would have mentioned in his two great books on salvation (Romans and Galatians) that baptism was necessary for salvation, but the only thing he mentions is faith. Baptism is assumed and it symbolizes what takes place in our hearts (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27), but it does not save us. God didn't just forget to throw in baptism in all the passages on salvation that say faith alone saves us because faith alone is what saves us. Acts 10:44-48 proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that baptism doesn't save you and is not essential for justification. In this passage the people were saved and even received the gift of the Holy Spirit before they were baptized. Baptism is important and so Peter immediately baptized them, but he didn't say, "Oh no, God made a mistake. He filled them with the Spirit before baptism; we better correct that mistake." Someone once told me, "Well, that is only one place in the Bible." My response was, "One place is enough if you believe the Bible is without error and completely sufficient for our lives" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If it is in the Bible once it is true. The thief on the cross also demonstrates that baptism doesn't save you (Luke 23:39-43). Some say that the thief was still under the Old Covenant, so this doesn't count as a proof. But the thief didn't die until after Jesus died and he trusted in Jesus not the Old Covenant (which wouldn't have done him any good because under the Old Covenant he would have had to offer a sacrifice). His trusting in Jesus saved him which puts him under the New Covenant and therefore he is an excellent proof that baptism doesn't save you. No, baptism doesn't save you, but it does symbolize the cleansing that comes through repentance. It is a wonderful picture of what takes place in our heart when we are saved. We die to sin (we are saved from sin), pictured

by the burial in water, and we are raised to a new life, pictured by our coming out of the water. When a person has seriously considered the ramifications of salvation and counted the cost (Luke 14:25-33), he or she then places his or her faith in Christ and outwardly expresses that faith in baptism. In our modernist age we underestimate the power of vivid pictures and symbols commanded in Scripture. God uses these outward acts to encourage and strengthen inward faith. In the Old Testament God's people offered sacrifices, circumcised their children and celebrated festivals as outward acts of inward faith. In the New Testament we are called to anoint the sick with oil, lay hands on future leaders, participate in the Lord's Supper and follow God in baptism. Baptism doesn't save you, but it is not an optional addendum to your Christian walk.

What about passages that seem to teach baptism saves you? These passages are very important, and they reveal the timing of salvation, but they don't actually teach baptism saves you. We already mentioned Acts 2:37-38. Though the passage seems to say baptism brings the forgiveness of sins, repentance/faith (an act of the heart) is actually what brings forgiveness. Luke wrote Acts and he also wrote the Gospel of Luke where he records the words of Jesus concerning the subject of the gospel and forgiveness in Luke 24:45-47. Verse 47 says, "and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed..." Notice Luke 24 is in agreement with Acts 2:38 that repentance brings forgiveness. Acts 3:19 also states, "Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Mark 1:4 calls John's baptism a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The inward heart of repentance and faith brings salvation, but it is normally expressed at baptism. Baptism is the normal time when people were saved. Acts 22:16 states, "And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name." Calling on His name is faith (Romans 10:13), which is what brings salvation, but it takes place at baptism. 1 Peter 3:21 also agrees with the idea that though baptism itself doesn't save us, it is the time we are saved. It states, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." At first this passage seems to teach that baptism does save you, but he explains himself by saying "not the removal of the filth of the flesh." In other words, it is not the outward physical act of baptism that saves you; it is the spiritual reality that baptism represents. That is why he goes on to describe baptism as "the pledge of a good conscience toward God." The pledge of surrender, trusting in Christ to forgive us and cleanse us, is what saves us. Real faith includes surrender to Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9). Many people put their trust in Jesus when they say a prayer led by someone or walk an aisle after an altar call and then later get baptized, but this is not the Scriptural norm. In Scripture, they heard the gospel, counted the cost, and when they were ready to repent, surrender to Christ as Lord and trust in Him alone for their salvation, they outwardly expressed that faith in baptism. They were saved at their baptism, but they were not saved by their baptism.

When Do I Get Baptized?

There are three major positions concerning the question, "When do I get baptized?" First much of the church has embraced infant baptism (paedo-baptism). The Church began to practice baptizing infants early in its history and it became the standard by the fourth century, but in the first two centuries there are no records of the church endorsing or practicing infant baptism. It appears that the Church began to practice infant baptism about the same time it started to believe in baptismal regeneration as well as the idea that babies go to hell if they die apart from baptism. We have seen that baptismal regeneration is not true, and we must also recognize that according

to the Bible all babies go to heaven if they die before the age of accountability (see my paper on “Do All Babies Go to Heaven?” and 2 Samuel 12:23; Romans 7:9). We do not need to baptize our children because of fear that they will go to hell if we don’t; this is an unbiblical and unloving doctrine we should reject. Usually those holding to infant baptism suggest that the doctrine of infant baptism is true even though the Bible does not mention it specifically, because it is the New Testament counterpart to Old Testament circumcision. Under the Old Covenant believer’s children were circumcised (actually only the males), even though they did not have the capacity for faith yet. Though there are some similarities concerning the Old and New Covenants, there are also some striking differences. If under the New Covenant we are to practice infant baptism, the Bible would have made this very clear in light of the importance of this doctrine. The Old Testament made it very clear that infants were to be circumcised, but this is not the case for the New Testament. Some say the “household” passages must indicate that babies were baptized (Acts 16:15, 33). But we should notice that the gospel was presented to the whole household and the whole household believed. Also, the passages never say anything about sprinkling infants, only baptizing believers.

The second major position concerning the timing of baptism is that a person should be baptized when he or she personally puts his or her trust in Christ; this position is known as believer’s baptism. Acts 8:36 reports the instance when Philip witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch. After Philip presented the gospel, it records: “As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, ‘Look, there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized?’ And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” Some manuscripts don’t include verse 37, but even if one does not believe that this verse was in the original manuscripts, it does represent early Christian thought concerning baptism and it is implied in the actual text. When you believe, you get baptized; this is the example throughout the Bible (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:38; 9:13; 10:47-48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5). Ephesians 4:5 speaks of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” The earliest of church history solidly backs the belief in believer’s baptism. To baptize infants without any Scriptural warrant is to add to the Bible and it completely misses the importance of baptism. Once infant baptism began to be practiced, sprinkling became the norm even though the Bible only endorses submersion. When Jesus was baptized Mark 1:10 naturally remarks, “And as soon as he came up out of the water...” When Philip baptized the eunuch, it says in Acts 8:39, “When they came up out of the water...” This was the normal mode because that is actually what baptism means. *Baptidzo* literally means to submerge. When the English translations came out, they transliterated (made up a new word that sounds similar to the Greek word) the word rather than translated it because they all practiced sprinkling at that time. To translate *baptidzo* as “submerge” would be admitting they were practicing the wrong method. The early Baptists recognized the true meaning of *baptidzo* and began to practice the correct mode of baptism and the correct timing – believer’s baptism by submersion.

The last position concerning the timing of baptism is the belief that it is no longer necessary. The Quakers believe that both the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are no longer necessary, because we now have the experience of the Spirit and no longer need the signs. There is no Scriptural warrant for this position. As we have seen above, when a person gets saved, he or she is immediately baptized. There is no prolonged waiting, no delay due to a lack of feeling. When a person is ready to place his or her faith in Christ, he or she is ready to be baptized.

Why Is Baptism Important?

Baptism is important first and foremost because Jesus commanded it. Matthew 28:19 gives the imperative to baptize all believers. It is simply disobedient not to get baptized. As followers of Christ, we are to obey him, even when we don't feel like it. In Acts 2:38 Peter also gives the imperative, "Repent and be baptized every one of you..." (NIV).

Another reason baptism is important is because it so beautifully pictures what takes place in the heart of a believer. Romans 6:3-5 states:

Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in a new way of life. For if we have been joined with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of His resurrection...

Our baptism pictures the truth that when we are saved, we die to the old way of life and receive resurrection life, eternal life from God. It portrays our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It is a testimony to the world that we have decided to follow Jesus.

Third baptism is important because it is the normal, Scriptural outward expression of our faith when we receive Christ (Acts 2:37-38; 8:36-39; 16:29-34). When we place our faith in Christ we are entering into a covenant with God, what Jesus called the New Covenant (Luke 22:20). A covenant is a binding agreement between two persons, like marriage. The marriage covenant includes vows of faithfulness and love and is sealed and signified by a ring. The ring signifies that the two people have committed to each other in marriage. In salvation we are covenanting with God. He promised to be our God and forgive our sins when we repent of our sins and place our faith in Christ. Baptism is the initial sign of the New Covenant and the Lord's Supper is the continuing sign. The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the signs and seals of our salvation much like the ring is the sign and seal of the marriage covenant.

Finally, baptism is important because it is a God-given means of blessing from God (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 6:3-5). Quite often people who are baptized are filled with the Spirit at the same time; this is because in true baptism the person is surrendering to God and thus yielding to the Holy Spirit. When we yield to the Spirit, He takes control of our lives, which is what it means to be filled with the Spirit – we are filled with Him when we are empty of our selfish desire to be in control. Baptism is a decisive moment of surrender and therefore is often accompanied by the filling of the Spirit.

Believer's baptism by submersion is the only Biblically sanctioned mode of baptism. It should be the first act of obedience of the believer. I will never forget my own baptism. I was baptized with my brother whom I led to the Lord. The pastor likened us to Andrew and Peter. Baptism is meant to be a special time with your church family, where you publically proclaim that you are a follower of Christ. If you have not been baptized yet and you are ready to repent of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, then what are you waiting for? When a person has seriously considered the ramifications of salvation and counted the cost (Luke 14:25-33), he or she then places his or her faith in Christ and outwardly expresses that faith in baptism.

We are saved from our sin by the grace of God through faith in Jesus and His death on the cross. This faith naturally includes surrender and repentance. When we are ready to get saved, we are

baptized, trusting in Christ alone for our salvation and a changed life follows. This is true salvation!

Assurance

How can we be assured of this salvation? There are three tests:

1) The Holy Spirit will assure you in your heart by your sensing His presence (1 John 3:24; 4:13; Romans 5:5; 8:16).

2) The Bible will assure you (Romans 10:9-13). Did you do the things the Bible says are necessary for salvation? Did you Biblically trust in Jesus with a faith that includes repentance and surrender? Then you are saved. The Bible doesn't lie. Don't go by your feelings. "Well, I don't feel saved today." Feelings come and go. Go by the truth of the Bible.

3) Your life will be changed. All Christians produce fruit (Matthew 7:16-23). How do you tell an apple tree is an apple tree? By the fruit. The fruit is not what saves you, but it is evidence that you have been saved (Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 2:1-3). This doesn't mean you are perfect. The Apostle Paul hadn't even arrived yet (Philippians 3:12-14). But it does mean there is a noticeable change in your life, and you are beginning to experience the fruit of the Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22-23).

If all of these tests apply, then you are a Christian. If they don't then you can become a Christian. Repent of your sins, place your faith in Jesus and express that faith outwardly in baptism. Here is a simple prayer if you truly mean it with your heart:

God, I am a sinner. I don't deserve your grace. I am tired of this life of sin. Please save me from it. I believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so my sins could be forgiven. Jesus come into my life; save me from my sins; change my life and make me the person you want me to be, and I will follow you the rest of my days. I will now profess this faith in baptism. Thank you for saving me. Amen.

Once you are saved and baptized, join a Bible believing church, start serving God with the spiritual gifts He gives you, and seek to grow in Christ through daily Bible reading, prayer, worship and fellowship. And please tell someone else about Jesus!