

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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What God Says About Baptism

Much confusion exists in the religious world about the purpose and nature of baptism. Though man teaches conflicting views, God's teaching about baptism is consistent.

We should note that baptism *alone* does not save anyone.

Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches "*for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*" It is clear from these verses that we do not earn, or deserve, salvation. Instead, salvation is offered as a gift by God through Christ. Were it not for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, we would have no chance to be saved.

Furthermore, baptism is not the *only* thing required of *us* in order to be saved. Notice that **Ephesians 2:8** mentions salvation "*through faith*," indicating that faith in the Lord is necessary for salvation.

Though we are not saved by baptism *alone*, baptism *is* required for salvation.

Salvation "*by grace*" "*through faith*" is a biblical doctrine. Salvation "*by grace alone*" and/or "*through faith alone*" is a manmade doctrine that conflicts with God's teachings. The only time God speaks of "faith alone" or "faith only," He does so to point out that we are *not* justified by faith only (**James 2:24**).

God teaches that works of obedience *are* required in order for us to be saved. In **Philippians 2:12**, the Holy Spirit commands "*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" When speaking of Jesus, the Holy Spirit said "*He became to all of those who obey Him the author of eternal salvation,*" (**Heb. 5:9**).

A specific work of obedience God requires in order to receive His gift of salvation is baptism (**1 Pet. 3:21; Mark 16:16**).

This connection is better understood when we read what scriptural baptism does for us.

When instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus said that His blood was "*shed for many for the remission of sins*" (**Matt. 26:28**).

Notice what else is "*for the remission of sins*," as stated by the Lord's inspired apostle in **Acts 2:38**: "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"

Repentance and baptism in the name of Christ is linked to "*remission of sins*" (or "*forgiveness of sins*" – **WEB**), just as the blood of Christ is.

In other words, baptism is necessary for us to come into contact with the cleansing blood of Christ. The blessings made possible through Jesus' death are bestowed on those who submit to God's teachings, including His teaching on baptism (cf. **Acts 22:16**).

Baptism is necessary for our sins to be forgiven, and thus, for us to be saved.

Notice also what the New Testament teaches about the point at which one gets "*into Christ*."

Romans 6:3 says, "*Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*" **Galatians 3:27** says, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*"

The New Testament clearly teaches that the point at which one gets "*into Christ*" (i.e. becomes a New Testament Christian) is when he or she is scripturally baptized.

Baptism was not required for those subject to the Law of Moses, but for those subject to the

Law of Christ, as all of us are, baptism is necessary for salvation.

Not only is baptism required for salvation, but more specifically, water baptism by immersion is necessary for salvation.

This point is seen in the account of Philip and the eunuch. When the eunuch asked Philip a question about a passage from Isaiah, "*Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached to him Jesus*" (**Acts 8:35**).

Verse 36 helps us see what preaching Jesus includes. The verse says, "*As they went on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Behold, here is water. What is keeping me from being baptized?'*"

Not only does this verse show the necessity of baptism, it shows the necessity of *water* baptism, with the words "*here is water.*"

Verses 38-39 go on to describe what scriptural baptism looks like. The verses do not describe (so-called) "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring. Instead, the verses teach that "*they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him*" (**verse 38**). **Verse 39** mentions them coming "*up out of the water,*" showing again that this was not a sprinkling or pouring.

That baptism is by immersion is seen when considering the definition of the Greek words used in the New Testament translated as baptize or baptism. That baptism is by immersion is also seen in **Colossians 2:12**, with the words "*buried with Him in baptism.*"

Romans 6:4-6 likewise shows that baptism is by immersion, and explains the significance of this. There is a connection between the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and what happens at baptism. Being immersed in water is connected to "putting off" the old man of sin, "burying" that sinful life in the waters of baptism, and rising to "*walk in newness of life.*"

One who has only had water sprinkled or poured upon him or her as a means of "being

baptized" has not been scripturally baptized, as God commands for salvation.

Another key point concerning baptism is what the Bible teaches should precede baptism.

It does not take months of study to know what is needed to become a Christian. In fact, many of the examples in the New Testament that show people becoming Christians occur after those individuals heard just one lesson. However, there *are* some things noted in the New Testament that precede baptism.

The eunuch could not come to the decision to be baptized until He heard the truth about Jesus (**Acts 8:35**), and believed the truth about Jesus Christ being the Son of God. When the eunuch requested to be baptized, Philip answered "*if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*" (**Acts 8:37** – KJV). The eunuch confessed "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" (**verse 37** – KJV; cf. **Rom. 10:10**).

Something that is implied about the eunuch is that he was determined to submit his life to God's will. This ties in with **Acts 2:38**. Just before the apostle Peter commanded baptism, he commanded "*Repent.*"

Repentance involves a change of mind, or, more generally, a change of direction. For us, it means turning in the opposite direction of sin.

One who believes on Jesus and wants to become a Christian should have a desire to do what is right, recognizing that he or she is expected to submit to God not only in the act of baptism, but in his or her life in general.

While man has come up with many ideas concerning baptism, please consider what *God* says about baptism. It is *His* Word that will judge us (cf. **John 12:48**).

For those who have not been scripturally baptized, consider the exhortation of the Lord's messenger in **Acts 22:16**: "*Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*"

- **Michael Hickox**