

In Defense of Baptism: What the Bible Really Teaches  
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“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except a man be born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).” This truth spoken by our Lord announces that the new birth and salvation are forever doctrinally connected. Whatever conditions are necessary for the “new birth,” are also necessary for salvation. It is on behalf of this truth that I pray God will be with me in making the strongest case I know how in proving (according to the scriptures) that baptism is indeed essential to salvation. It is unreasonable that anyone would preach that a person is saved before baptism. And should any in the church gravitate to that conclusion, I pray that they strongly reconsider their position.

I beg your tolerance because I am going to set before you a belief that is contrary to scripture. I want to do this so that I might analyze it with you, and set it aright before your eyes. This piece represents a commentary on Acts 2:38. Here it is in its entirety.

**Acts 2:38. Repent means “to change one’s mind.” Here, as throughout Scripture, one aspect of conversion is commonly used to represent all aspects: believing and calling as well as repenting. The grammatical name for allowing part of something to represent the whole is called synecdoche. Repentance is something every person must do (Acts 17:30). For several reasons be baptized should not be joined with for the remission of sins to teach baptismal regeneration. First, the context of this passage demonstrates that only the repentance is connected with the removal of sin at salvation: “Whosoever shall call...shall be saved” (v.21). Peter’s next recorded sermon states only: “Repent... that your sins may**

**be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Second, throughout Acts men demonstrate their faith and salvation prior to baptism (cf. 10:43-47). Third, the soteriological passages throughout the New Testament do not include water baptism in the salvation experience—John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Romans 4:10; Ephesians 2:1-10; I Peter 1:18, 19. Thus this verse more clearly reads, “Repent for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift which is the Holy Spirit; and let each of you be baptized in the name of Christ.” Though water baptism does not save or wash away our sins, it is a command that needs to be obeyed speedily after conversion. Jesus commanded it (Matthew 28:19, 20), as does Peter here. This is the consistent pattern throughout Acts (16:31-34; 18:8).**

Having set this matter before you in its entirety, I will now test the validity of its logic using the scriptures as the standard. It is not my purpose to advance any personal convictions here. I will let the bible speak for itself since salvation is the result of the Master’s death, burial, resurrection, and the apostles’ doctrine. The Son of God, the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament advocate baptism as being essential to salvation. Baptism’s importance in the scheme of salvation comes from the very highest authority.

The commentary states that repentance is *a change of mind*, and so it is according to the scripture. This truth is a settled matter. But to say that *one aspect of conversion is commonly used to represent all aspects*, and the aspect in this particular case—**repentance**, is the point where salvation is reached and the remission of sins granted, is to go grievously beyond sound doctrine. The commentator stated that Acts 2:38 was not clearly stated in the King James Version. He said that more clearly stated, it should read, **“Repent for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift which is the Holy Spirit; and**

**let each of you be baptized in the name of Christ.”** Stated this way, baptism is not essential to salvation.

**Repentance, but not baptism, is connected to the removal of sin (Acts 2:21 and Acts 3:19)**

The two texts cited to represent this argument are Acts 2:21 and Acts 3:19. **“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21).”** The other reads, **“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).”** Addressing the first issue (Acts 2:21), we must make a determination as to its meaning. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans had this to say in Romans 10:9-16.

10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10:10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

10:11. For the scripture saith, WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH ON HIM SHALL NOT BE ASHAMED.

10:12. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

10:13. FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED.

10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

10:15. And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THEM THAT PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, AND BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!

10:16. But they all have not obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, LORD, WHO HATH BELIVED OUR REPORT?

The idea that salvation would come merely by calling on the name of the Lord is not what the New Testament is proclaiming. What Paul is saying here is that the gospel must be preached, believed and obeyed. If that is the case, then the conditions of salvation must be met before salvation is obtained. That which Peter stated in Acts 2:21 led to what was commanded in Acts 2:38.

Let us move on to Acts 3:19, which states, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord.” For many, this text can be somewhat troublesome given the language. I will do my best to establish a workable context broad enough to see if a parallel exist between Acts 3:19 and Acts 2:38. Let us now clear the table that we may spread the cloth of Acts 3:19 in a suitable fashion.

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. KJV.*

*Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. NAS.*

*Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. NIV.*

There are two obvious factors present in Acts 3:19 that are mentioned in Acts 2:38; those factors are repent and the blotting out of sins, the wiping away of sins, and the wiping out of sins. None will dare argue against something so vivid. Now let us move to the less obvious—“and be converted (return or turn to God),” and the other part which reads “times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” Is it structurally possible that these less obvious factors found in Acts 3:19 fit that part of Acts 2:38 which reads, “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Could Acts 3:19 in its language “repent and be converted” mean “repent and repent?” Such double usage would indicate redundancy (repetition), and it would not be required in the language of the gospel. Human writers in their own writings avoid such a problem, how much more would an inspired proclaimer avoid such. It is in the thinking of this uninspired writer that the idea of “be converted” involves the command of baptism. There is a question that begs answering at this point. Did the great apostle Peter preach in Acts 3:19 an entirely different gospel than he did on Pentecost? If the answer is YES, then there is more than one gospel. The bible does not support that! Peter will not be accursed for preaching another gospel because he did not preach another gospel. Whatever was required of the people in Acts 2 was required in Acts 3. I believe the bible equates conversion in Acts 3:19 with baptism in Acts 2:38, and “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” in Acts 3:19 with “ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” in Acts 2:38.

I wish to make some points eminently clear at this juncture of the paper. Is baptism a mystical sacrament that has some magical power when conducted? In a paper entitled, *The Matter of “Baptismal Regeneration,”* dated October 9, 2001, Wayne Jackson, a writer for the Christian Courier, stated, “There is nothing in the teaching of the Scriptures which would even remotely suggest that there is some magical essence inherent in the water of baptism that can affect the forgiveness of sin. Rather, baptism,

i.e., immersion in water, is a rite that is accompanied by both faith (Mark 16:16) and repentance (Acts 2:38). Void of those prerequisites, it has no validity whatsoever.”

We have often said that the “blood of Christ” was in the water-- a statement left best unsaid without proof. Such a point would immediately raise a question -- “If the blood is not in the water, is there remission of sin?” A follow-up question would then come, “Is blood required in the water for the remission of sin to be realized?” The answer to the first question is YES; the second, NO. How is this so? How can one answer such questions so affirmatively or negatively with such certainty? One does not have to conduct a chemical sampling of the water for blood in order to assure that the penitent believer will be forgiven. It is not what is found in the water, but rather what is stated in scripture that matters.

**Is Mark 16:15, 16 citable for a text? What about the controversy?**

There are some scholars who believe that Mark should not even be considered in the case of baptism because of some technical problems in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. Let me explain. There are some who believe Mark’s gospel ends at Mark 16:8 instead of Mark 16: 20. I would say that such would be convenient because Mark 16:16 would not have to appear on the biblical radar screen. Wayne Jackson in a paper, *The Assault upon Mark 16:16*, under a subheading titled, **The Authenticity of the passage**, said the following:

**Because Mark 16:9-20 is missing from two of the oldest Greek manuscripts, and from some of the early versions, and because of certain perceived problems in the continuity between 16:9ff (verses 9-20, Martin) and the preceding context, most textual critics today question the genuineness of this section. That is, they dispute that it was a part of Mark’s *original* Gospel (see Robertson, Metzger, etc.). It must be noted though, that some of these men concede that this disputed segment of the final chapter of Mark nonetheless reflects the inspired teaching of Jesus (Grassmick, 194). On the other hand, the**

**genuineness of the text has been defended by some very respectable scholars (e.g., Scrivener, Burgon, McGarvey, Lenski.)**

**W.R.Farmer has argued that the evidence indicates that Mark was the author of 16:9-20, but that he likely penned it before the composition of the Gospel record. He feels that the disputed text was added to the end of the Gospel manuscript at a later time.**

If we look at Mark 16:16, we will find, **“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”** It is argued that in Mark 16:16(A), **“He that believeth and is baptized..., ”** belief is the primary point. Baptism is a minor point. They make this claim because of Mark 16:16B, which states, **“But he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”** They say that if baptism is not a part of Mark 16:16B, what significant role does it play in Mark 16:16A? They say that its exclusion in mark 16:16B proves that **condemnation is fixed to belief and not baptism.** If it were fixed to both, then baptism would be essential to salvation, they say. Is their position reasonable? Is it scriptural? **Their argument** states that the scripture means **He that believeth shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.** Baptism appears as an orphan looking through the windows of a house where faith and salvation commune at the table. *The same would be true of Acts 2:38 when the understanding is that repentance is the primary key that unleashes the remission of sins.* **Baptism is merely an afterthought to be done since forgiveness of sins has already been given.**

**What is the Master really saying in Mark 16:16?** Is the Master excluding baptism? What Jesus is saying is that if belief is continued through the act of baptism, salvation will be the result. I beg you to consider the following: Faith is established though the Word (Romans 10:17). The Word reveals the death of the Son of God because of sin. Christ died for our sins according to the scripture (I Corinthians 15:3, 4). That the innocent should die for the sins of the guilty prompts repentance in the human heart

(Acts 2:38). Now we have a penitent believer, but not yet a Christian. In Acts 2:41, the bible states, **“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there was added unto them about three thousand souls.”** Were they added before or after baptism? Obedience to the command of baptism completes the positive consequence of Mark 16:16A. At the end of this consequence is salvation. If it is argued that since baptism is not a part of the second part of Mark 16:16, which says, **“But he that disbelieveth shall be condemned,”** it is not a part of salvation-- again, their reasoning is wrong. Here is why. Baptism is in a sense not separate from faith because it is the Word of God that presents it as a command. We must believe in it as a command, but not merely just a command but also a condition of entrance into the kingdom. Jesus makes this point abundantly clear in John 3:5, **“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** Unless the term water in this verse represents something symbolic, it refers to baptism. Water is not a symbol, but a substance. For those advocates of Spirit baptism as the means to get into Christ, there lies the “water baptism” problem. If their assumption is correct, Jesus did not mean actual water in John 3:5, and Peter could not have meant it in I Peter 3:21. Thank God—such is not the case! Being born of water is being baptized. The absence of baptism in Mark 16:16B exists because of the absence of faith. Let me clarify. Faith requires that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and in believing this-- to also believe and obey the commands he has set forth for our deliverance from past sins. If we do not believe in the Son of God, why believe in His commands. In a tract entitled “Our Position,” published by the Christian Publishing Company, St. Louis, Isaac Erret (one of the ablest Disciples of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) said, “As to the design of baptism, we part company with the Baptists, and find ourselves more at home on the other side of the house: yet we cannot say that our position is just the same with that of any of them. Baptists say they baptize believers because they are forgiven, and they insists that they shall have the evidence of pardon before they are baptized. But the language used in the



Scriptures declaring what baptism is for, is so plain and unequivocal that the great majority of Protestants as well as the Roman Catholics admit it in their creeds to be, in some sense, for the remission of sins. The latter, however, and many of the former, attach to it the idea of regeneration, and insist that in baptism regeneration by the Holy Spirit is actually conferred. Even the Westminster Confession squints strongly in this direction, albeit its professed adherents of the present time attempt to explain away its meaning. We are as far from this ritualistic extreme as from the anti-ritualism into which the Baptists have been driven. With us, regeneration must be so far accomplished before baptism that the subject is changed in heart, and in faith and penitence must have yielded up his heart to Christ—otherwise baptism is nothing more than an empty form. But forgiveness is somewhat distinct from regeneration. Forgiveness is an act of the Sovereign—not a change of the sinner’s heart; and while it is extended in view of the sinner’s faith and repentance, it needs to be offered in a sensible and tangible form, such that the sinner can seize it and appropriate it with unmistakable definiteness. In baptism he appropriates God’s promise of forgiveness, relying on the divine testimonies; “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” He thus lays hold of the promise of Christ and appropriates it as his own. He does not merit it, nor procure it, nor earn it, in being baptized; but he appropriates what the mercy of God has provided and offered in the gospel. We therefore teach all that are baptized that, if they bring to their baptism a heart that renounces sin and implicitly trusts the power of Christ to save, they should rely on the Savior’s own promise—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

