

Is Baptism Required For Salvation?

Is baptism necessary for salvation? Some people claim that water baptism is required in order to be saved from our sin. You will learn, “Do you have to be baptized to be saved?” It is a question that every Christian should honestly desire to know if they want their sins forgiven or want to be sure their sins are forgiven. If we are wrong on this question, we are in serious trouble. If water baptism is required in addition to believing in Jesus, then we need to know. This is a controversial issue with some people, but everyone who is serious about pleasing God will desire to know the truth. In answering this question, we will explore the background and meaning of baptism and the meaning of the New Testament passages related to baptism and salvation.

MEANING OF BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. Historically, water has been used down through the ages by various religious groups in a religious rite of initiation. The Jews required that a Gentile who desired to become a convert to Judaism be circumcised, undergo a ritual bath, and offer a sacrifice. The Jews taught that baptism washed away their former impurity.¹ Within Judaism the ritual bath was referred to as baptism. Baptism was used to symbolize purification and repentance.² Leland Ryken et al states in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*,

Ceremonial washing became part of Jewish piety in the Hellenistic period, and in the two centuries before the time of Jesus,

1. Leland Ryken et al. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. InterVarsity Press. 1998. p. 72.

2. Ibid.

Jewish people were immersing themselves at appropriate times. Pharisees began to apply the priestly practice of hand washing.

Jewish people practiced one particular kind of once-for-all ritual washing, however. This was the baptism administered to Gentiles when they wished to convert to Judaism and wash away their former impurity. Baptism was so characteristic of Jewish conversion



rituals, next to the more painful accompanying practice of male *circumcision, that even pagan writers like Epictetus mention it. According to later Jewish regulations concerning private baptisms, the immersion must be so complete that even if a person were otherwise naked, the immersion would be invalidated if so much as the string of a bean covered the space between two teeth. But full immersion, coupled with circumcision (for males) and a sincere heart, meant conversion. Some later Jewish teachers

insisted that a Gentile converted in this manner became “like a newborn child,” completely separated from his or her Gentile past.³

The Greek word for “to baptize” is *baptizo*. The ancients used this Greek word in a variety of ways. For example, the word has the meaning “to dip, to immerse, to bathe, to drown, to sink, to perish, and to go under.” One significant usage of the word is a reference to a ship “sinking.”⁴ It referred to dipping into water. Due to disagreements about the method of baptism, the King James Version Bible did not give us the meaning of the verb *baptizo* but transliterated it, or converted each Greek word to an English word in order to avoid controversy. Therefore, the King James Version Bible used “baptize” rather than its meaning “to dip” or “to immerse.” It was a political decision rather than a desire to be faithful to Scripture.

Two difficult New Testament passages for those who believe that *baptizo* means to sprinkle are Mark 1:5 and John 3:23.

And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Mark 1:5 (NASB)

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized . . . John 3:23 (NASB)

Mark 1:5 is about John the Baptist baptizing people in the middle of the Jordan River. In John 3:23 we are told that baptism was occurring where there was “much water.” The Greek word for “much” is *polys*. The Greek word is also translated as “great” or “large.” That is, John needed a great amount of water. Both verses reveal John needed “much water.” Obviously, he did not need “much water” to sprinkle someone. A cup of water would have been sufficient for sprinkling. He only needed “much water” to immerse someone down into the water. This agrees with the historic meaning of the Greek word

3. Ibid. pp. 72-73.

4. Albrecht Oepke, “Βάπτω, βαπτίζω, βαπτισμός, βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995. vol. 1, p. 530. “to sink”: ἐν ῥλή (in the mud), Plot. Enn., I, 8, 13 (I, p. 112, 6, Volkman; → 532), “to suffer shipwreck,” “to drown,” “to perish”: Jos. Bell., 3, 525; Epict. Gnom. Stob. Fr. 47, p. 489

that is transliterated as baptize. This helps us understand that baptism referred to someone being immersed into the water.

Romans 6:3-4 refers to baptism figuratively in order to explain that believers have died to the old self and have become a new self. Verse 3 figuratively says believers have been baptized into Christ and into His death.

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Romans 6:3 (NASB)

Verse 4 says we are figuratively “raised from the dead.”

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4 (NASB)

These figurative descriptions clearly assume that biblical baptism is immersion. A believer is figuratively baptized or buried in the ground and raised from the dead. The language is about death. To be buried into Christ’s death describes the reality of the old self dying and rising to new spiritual life. This only happens through Jesus.

MEANING OF JOHN’S BAPTISM. Once again, this helps us understand that John’s baptism did not save people. It was symbolic. In Matthew 3:1-6 we find John the Baptist baptizing people who were confessing their sins. The Greek text in Matthew 3:5-6 reveals that those people who confessed their sins were baptized.

Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. Matthew 3:5-6 (NASB)

In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist told the Pharisees that he baptized those who repented.

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance . . . Matthew 3:11 (NASB)

Another important passage is Mark 1:2-4 which says,

3 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY;

3 THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’”

4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:2-4 (NASB)

Verses 2-3 says that John prepared the way for Christ. These are quotes from the prophecies in Malachi 3:1-2 and Isaiah 40:3. John was preparing people for the arrival of Jesus. Then verse 4 says that John’s baptism was about repentance. His baptism was not about sorrow over the consequences of some sin or foolish decision or action. His baptism was about repentance over sin in preparation for forgiveness. He was preparing the way for Christ’s death and resurrection. That is, John’s baptism was about repenting of sin in anticipation of the forgiveness of sins that would occur through Jesus Christ. It did not forgive anyone’s sins. John’s baptism was symbolic of repentance in anticipation of the Messiah.

JOHN’S BAPTISM IN THE BOOK OF ACTS. The book of Acts is a historical snapshot of the development of the early church and it provides valuable insight into the teaching about baptism. In Acts 13:24 we are reminded again that John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance.

... after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Acts 13:24 (NASB)

Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” Acts 19:4 (NASB)

Acts 13:24 tells us that John was preaching about baptism *before* Jesus came, and Acts 19:4 adds that John’s baptism was about repentance and he was telling people to believe in Jesus, the Messiah who was coming! That is, John was preparing people for Christ’s coming. Once again, we learn that John’s

baptism did not save anyone from sin. That was not its purpose.

Another important passage is Acts 19:3-5 since it gives us a more complete understanding of John’s baptism.

And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:3-5 (NASB)

Once again we learn that John the Baptist baptized people in preparation for the coming of Christ. He encouraged them to believe on Jesus who would come after him. John’s baptism was for people who were repenting of their sin in preparation for Messiah.

ANCIENT RECORDS ABOUT JOHN’S BAPTISM. John the Baptist was such a famous individual that even the Roman historian Josephus commented about John the Baptist and his baptism that it was not about purification of the soul. It was a symbolic act of outer purification.

Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness toward one another and piety toward God, and so to come to baptism; for the washing if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, of some sin but for purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.⁵

The historical perspective, while not inspired by God, is consistent with the New Testament teaching about baptism. Baptism did not result in righteousness. It was only a symbolic act of a repentant heart. Baptism occurred after the soul was “purified.” This quote teaches us that John’s water baptism was for people who had repented of their sin in preparation for Messiah.

IS BAPTISM REQUIRED FOR SALVATION? The New Testament contains at least thirty-three passages that refer to believing in Jesus Christ as a requirement in order to be saved

5. Flavius Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18.5.2.

New Testament Passages About Believing, Repenting, Confessing and Being Baptized

Passage	Believe	Repent	Confess	Baptized	New Testament Passages (NASB)
Mark 1:15	X	X			... repent and believe in the gospel.
Mark 16:16	X			X	He who believes and is baptized will be saved . . .
Luke 8:12	X				... so that they may not believe and be saved.
John 1:12	X				... the right to become children of God, to those who believe . . .
John 3:5				X	... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
John 3:15	X				... so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.
John 3:16	X				... whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.
John 3:18	X				He who believes in Him is not judged . . .
John 3:36	X				He who believes in the Son has eternal life . . .
John 5:24	X				... he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life . . .
John 6:40	X				... everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life . . .
John 6:47	X				Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.
John 11:25-26	X				He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies
John 20:31	X				... but these have been written that . . . believing you may have life in His name
Acts 2:37-38		X		X	... Repent, and let each of you be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins . . .*
Acts 3:19		X			Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away . . .*
Acts 10:43	X				... everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.
Acts 16:31	X				Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved . . .
Acts 19:4	X			X	John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him . . .
Acts 26:18	X				... receive forgiveness of sins and . . . have been sanctified by faith in Me.
Romans 1:16	X				... for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
Romans 3:22	X				... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe . . .
Romans 4:3	X				... ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS . . .
Romans 6:4				X	... buried with Him through baptism into death . . . Christ was raised from the dead
Romans 10:9	X		X		... confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart . . .
Galatians 3:6	X				... Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS . . .
Gal. 3:22	X				... the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe . . .
Ephesians 2:8-9	X				For by grace you have been saved through faith . . . not as a result of works . . .
1 Timothy 1:16	X				... as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life . . .
James 2:23	X				AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS . . .
1 Pet 1:9	X				... obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls . . .
1 Pet. 3:21				X	... now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh . . .
1 John 3:23	X				And this is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ

or to have salvation (see chart on the last page).

There are only three passages that clearly refer to both repentance and salvation. There is one passage that explicitly states that a person must confess that Jesus is their Lord and there are six passages that refer to baptism in connection with salvation. Of those six times, only two of them are mentioned at the same time with believe or believes. This means the vast majority of the New Testament passages about what is required for salvation do not include baptism as a condition for salvation. Therefore, we will explore what the Bible teaches about a person being saved by baptism.

Since most of the New Testament passages never mention baptism as being necessary for salvation, the following discussion will include the six passages that do refer to baptism. *They are preceded with an asterisk for easy identification.*

**Mathew 28:19-20 - Make Disciples, Baptize and Teach.* Just before Jesus returned to heaven He told the apostles to make disciples and then to baptize them. This command is recorded in Matthew 28:19-20.

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 the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)

Here Jesus teaches us that a person becomes a disciple or a Christian first and then they are baptized. That is, baptism follows a person becoming a disciple. Before we continue, we should ask, “What is a disciple?” Acts 14:21 clearly connects the preaching of the gospel with a person becoming a disciple.

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples . . . Acts 14:21 (NASB)

Other significant passages that reveal a believer or a Christian was a disciple are Acts 6:1-2; Acts 6:7 and Acts 13:52. That is, the term disciple referred to someone who believed in Jesus, was following Jesus and was growing in the faith. They were Christians.

Then Jesus told the apostles to baptize and teach them.

Obviously, the reason a disciple is taught Scripture is that they are believers. The point is simple. The command to baptize was not to make a person a Christian. It was a demonstration of their identity with Christ. They figuratively die to their old self and are raised to new life. The sequence is that they become a Christian first, are baptized and then learn how to live and grow in the Christian life. The order is very clear. So, Jesus established the principle and the pattern.

**Mark 16:16 - Believe and Be Baptized.* Mark 16:16 can leave the impression that both water baptism and belief in Jesus are necessary in order to be forgiven of our sins—to be saved.

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. Mark 16:16 (NASB)

A clear understanding of this verse requires that we closely consider the first and last parts of the verse. The first part tells us how to be saved and appears to require baptism. The last part of the sentence gives us a clear warning that those who do not believe will not be saved. The last part of the verse is very important because it reveals that there is only one thing that will cause a person to be condemned or not be saved. It is that they do not believe. If baptism was essential for salvation, then why was baptism not included? If baptism is required then the verse should have read something like this: “. . . but he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.” But the verse does not read that way. A person is only condemned if they do not believe.

We have already discovered that water baptism is sometimes included after someone believes in Jesus because baptism shows that a believer is serious about his or her commitment to follow Christ. It is a symbol to others of a heart commitment to God.

**John 3:5 - Born of Water and the Spirit.* We are told in John 3:5 that Jesus told Nicodemus what he must do to “be born again.” That is, what he must do to enter the kingdom of God—to be saved.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

John 3:5 (NASB)

Imagine for a moment that you are Nicodemus. If Nicodemus had been watching John the Baptist and Jesus, what do you think he would have seen them doing? First, he would have watched Jesus do miracles and perform signs. Second, he would have watched Jesus talk with people and seen people baptized as they repented of their sins. John 2:1-12, 23 tells us that Jesus did miracles and signs. We know from John 3:22-23 and 4:1-2 that both John and Jesus baptized people. Both of them had baptized and taught others, but only Jesus performed miracles and did signs.

The baptism of John and Jesus was about repentance over sins - not salvation. Their baptism was one of preparation and not about salvation. So when Jesus referred to water in verse 5, what do you think Nicodemus would have thought about? As we have already said, we know from John 3:22-23 and 4:1-2 that both John and Jesus were baptizing people. But if we look closely at John 3:25-26, we discover that their baptism is referred to as purification. The Jewish ritual of baptism was a symbolic act of purification. It did nothing for the one being baptized. It was strictly a symbolic act. Nicodemus would have understood that the baptisms of John and Jesus were symbolic acts of purification - an indication that the one being baptized was repenting of his sins.

We must remember that Christian baptism did not occur until after Jesus returned to heaven. John and Jesus were not practicing Christian baptism. During their ministry, water baptism was symbolic of repentance. Nicodemus would have understood this and would have been reminded of Ezekiel 36:25-27 where “water” and “Spirit” are used together.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NASB)

Here the prophet Ezekiel connects a being sprinkled with

water to a new heart. He also connects a new heart with the Holy Spirit. Since Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel (John 3:10) he would know this passage. So, when Jesus said he had to be “born of water and the Spirit,” He would have understood that the Holy Spirit would clean his heart and give him a new heart. The Jews connected washing with water to purification or cleansing (John 3:25-26). Also, Titus 3:5 refers to washing of water to regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. So water was symbolic of the Spirit’s cleansing and transforming work of a person.

Baptism was an outward act of an inner heart-felt repentance. When people believe in Jesus, their sins are washed away (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:7) and at the same time they are given the Holy Spirit.

Notice John 3:6-8 indicates that one does not become spiritual by any human act, not by washing, not by physical birth, nor by anyone you know. Jesus’ message to Nicodemus is that he must be spiritually born by the Holy Spirit. If water baptism is so important, why did Jesus not include the act of physical baptism in John 3:8 and in John 3:16? Why did Jesus only refer to the Holy Spirit? Why is baptism left out of so many New Testament passages?

**Acts 2:38 - Repent and Be Baptized.* A passage that some claim reveals we are saved by being baptized is Acts 2:38. This passage occurs on the day of Pentecost in Peter’s sermon, which starts at verse 14 and ends in 36. In verse 21 Peter told the crowd how to be saved.

“AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.” Acts 2:21 (NASB)

At the end of his sermon, Peter declares that Jesus returned to life just as King David had predicted. Then verses 37 says,

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Acts 2:37 (NASB)

That is, the crowd was convicted, and why are they convicted? The answer is they believed in Christ and wanted to

know what they should do next. Peter told them whatever who has been saved must do. Here is what Peter said,

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38 (NASB)

After someone has believed in Jesus, the next step is to be baptized and then be taught Scripture (Matthew 28:19-20). Notice that Peter told the crowd that they needed to repent of their sins and demonstrate their commitment to turn from sin by being baptized. Repentance in Scripture is synonymous with believing faith.

I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:5 (NASB)

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

Acts 8:12 - They Believed and Were Baptized. Acts 8:12 states that after some Samaritans had believed in Christ, they were baptized by an apostle or another believer. The first very clear passage is Acts 8:12.

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. Acts 8:12 (NASB)

This passage is about some early believers in the region called Samaria. Philip had preached the gospel (Acts 8:4-11) and some people responded by believing in Christ and verse 12 says then they were baptized.

Then in Acts 8:14 we are told the apostles in Jerusalem heard that some people in Samaria had received the word of God. That is, they became believers at that point in time.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy

Spirit. Acts 8:14-15 (NASB)

This agrees with John 1:12-13 which says,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12-13 (NASB)

This passage does not tell us that we must be baptized in order to be saved. It simply refers to receiving Jesus and believing in His name. That is, those who believe in Jesus are those who receive Him.

What is not explained in Acts 8:14-15 is why the apostles went to Samaria in order to lay hands on them so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. But if we keep reading, we discover in Acts 11:1-18 that the apostles were amazed that God was saving the Gentiles. Samaritans were considered to be half Jewish by the Jews in Judah and Galilee. Later in Acts 15, a council was convened in Jerusalem to determine if Gentiles were being included in salvation and they concluded that God was including them. By requiring the apostles to lay hands on the Samaritans in order to receive the Holy Spirit, the apostles and the Samaritans had learned that salvation is offered to the Samaritans too! The salvation given to the Samaritans was the same salvation given to the Jews.

Acts 8:35-39 - Ethiopian Believed and Was Baptized. Throughout the New Testament the normal pattern that occurs at the moment someone believes in Jesus Christ is that they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit immediately begins living within the believer (John 3:6; Romans 8:9, 11, 13; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 6:16; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 1:13; 2:22; 4:30; 2 Timothy 1:14; James 4:5). Romans 8:9 teaches that if the Spirit is not living within a person, the person is not a believer.

However, in Acts 8:35-36 we are not told that the Holy Spirit began to live in an Ethiopian eunuch when he believed in Jesus. We are simply told that Philip had preached Jesus and then he asked to be baptized.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came

to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" Acts 8:35-36 (NASB)

The next verse, however, clarifies that a person was only allowed to be baptized if they had already believed in Christ.

[And 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."] Acts 8:37 (NASB)

The brackets on the verse are used by the NASB to indicate that the verse may not belong in the Bible since some manuscripts do not include this verse. Bruce Metzger gives evidence that reveals the verse was known in the late part of the second century.⁶ Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* also quotes part of it.⁷ But the best evidence suggests that the verse was inserted because a copyist wanted to clarify what had happened. This inserted verse agrees with the doctrine of salvation taught throughout the New Testament. It describes what happens after a person becomes a Christian. That is, a person believes, the Holy Spirit begins to live in the person, and then they are baptized.

Acts 9:22-26; 26:18 - Paul Believed and Was Baptized. Acts 9:1-9 tells us how the apostle became a Christian. While the passage never tells us that Paul believed in Christ it is implied throughout the passage since Paul obeyed the Lord's instruction. Later in Acts 9:17-18 we are told that afterwards, Paul received the Holy Spirit and then was baptized. We have already discovered in our discussion of Acts 8:35-39, the pattern that occurs at the moment someone believes in Christ is that they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and then later they are baptized. But here Paul is not filled with the Spirit until later in order to help him connect with Ananias, who is a Christian. Paul needed instruction in the faith and apparently that occurred in Acts 9:19.

Later in Acts 21:37-22:11 Paul shares his testimony to a crowd of Jews. Acts 22:10-15 indicates that he obeyed the Lord's instructions and later in verse 16 he was baptized, having called on the name of the Lord.

6. Bruce M Metzger. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. United Bible Societies. 1994. p. 315.

7. Irenaeus. *Against Heresies*. 3.12.8.

Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name. Acts 22:16 (NASB)

It is important to note that the Greek tense of the word that is translated as "calling" is an aorist participle. The aorist refers to a completed action and the participle refers to ongoing action. That is, the reason Paul's sins were forgiven was that he had been calling on the name of Jesus. It was completed action prior to the baptism. This verse is not teaching that baptism washes away our sins, contrary to the claims of some. The message is that "calling on Jesus" washed away Paul's sins.

This becomes clear in Acts 26:12-23 when Paul gave his testimony again. In verse 18, Paul told King Agrippa what the Lord had asked him to do. Then he quotes the Lord,

... to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. Acts 26:18 (NASB)

Notice that Jesus did not even mention baptism. Now if baptism is so important for salvation, why did the Lord Jesus not mention it? Instead, the Lord says "forgiveness of sins," a believer's eternal inheritance and sanctification (to be made holy) occurs "by faith in Me." This agrees with Titus 3:4-6,

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, Titus 3:4-6 (NASB)

Notice that the washing of regeneration and renewing occurs by the Holy Spirit and not by baptism. Therefore, we have been taught that the forgiveness of sins is not by baptism. Paul clearly teaches that he was not saved by being dipped into water, which is a work. Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us that we are not saved by works. Romans 4:4-5 teaches that if we work for our salvation, we will go to hell because salvation cannot be earned. Further, Romans 6:30 states that eternal life is a gift.

We cannot earn a gift.

Acts 10:44-48 - Cornelius Believed, was Spirit-filled and Baptized. Another important passage about salvation is Acts 10:44-48.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days. Acts 10:44-48 (NASB)

This is a great passage that strongly reveals Cornelius believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit before he was baptized. Once again, the proof that someone is a believer is that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within them. Romans 8:9 tells us that the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. Romans 8:9 (NASB)

That is, if the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a person, then they are not a believer. The Apostle Paul never refers to baptism as the proof that a person is a Christian. He repeatedly states that the Holy Spirit lives in believers (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 1:13; 2:22; 2 Timothy 1:14; 1 John 3:24). Therefore, Cornelius was a Christian before he was baptized. The point is that baptism does not forgive sins and does not save. As we have already discovered, baptism is a symbolic act.

Acts 16:14-15 - Lydia Believed and Was Baptized. Baptism of a woman called Lydia is described in Acts 16. We are told that as she was listening to Paul preaching, she opened her heart to the Lord. She believed in Christ. Then she was

baptized.

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized . . . Acts 16:14-15 (NASB)

Acts 16:31-33 - Jailer Believed and Was Baptized. This is another passage about baptism. This time a jailer believes in the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul is in prison and tells a jailer that if he believes in the Lord Jesus, he will be saved.

They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. Acts 16:31-33 (NASB)

Notice that Paul did not say that if the jailer believed and was baptized, he would be saved. Verse 33 says that the jailer was then baptized. He believed first and then he was baptized. When we are told that the jailer's household was also baptized, this implies that his family also believed in Jesus.

Acts 18:8 - Crispus Believed and Was Baptized. Acts 18:8 tells us that Crispus, a leader of the synagogue in Corinth, believed in Jesus and afterward was baptized. Once again baptism followed saving faith.

Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. Acts 18:8 (NASB)

**Acts 19:4 - John the Baptist's Baptism.* Acts 19:3-5 is another passage about the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul had spoken with some men who were disciples of John the Baptist. Here is what happened next.

And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism

of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:3-5 (NASB)

This passage was discussed before and we learned that John the Baptist baptized people in preparation for the coming of Christ. John B. Polhill in his commentary on Acts summarizes what verse 4 is all about.

Paul’s statement in v. 4 is the critical point. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, preparatory to the coming of the Messiah. John’s entire role as forerunner was to prepare the people for the Messiah’s coming. The Messiah had indeed come, and he is Jesus. Thus, to be a true disciple of John was to confess Jesus, for he is the one whom John had heralded. The real deficiency of these twelve or so was not their baptism. It was much more serious. They failed to recognize Jesus as the one whom John had proclaimed, as the promised Messiah.⁸

Acts 19:4 is not about how to be saved or to have one’s sins forgiven.

**Romans 6:4 - Baptism Into Christ’s Death.* Another passage that may appear to teach salvation by baptism is found in the book of Romans.

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4 (NASB)

Here the Holy Spirit gives us a better understanding of the meaning of baptism by using figurative language. It is a symbol of our dying along with Jesus and then returning to life just as Jesus did. So when a Christian is immersed into water, it symbolizes that he/she has died to sin. Notice that baptism is always connected to cleansing from sin. Then when we come up out of the water, it is symbolic of our new spiritual life in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:13-16 - Paul Baptized in Corinth. 1 Cor-

inthians 1:13-16 reveals that new believers in Christ were baptized.

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 1 Corinthians 1:13-16 (NASB)

Next, notice in verse 17 that Paul says he was not sent by Christ to baptize.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 1 Corinthians 1:17 (NASB)

Since Paul was highly committed to preaching the gospel, this helps us understand that baptism does not save anyone. Paul said Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel. That is, preaching is essential for salvation. Baptism is not essential to salvation. Yes, Christ told the apostles to make disciples and then baptize them according to Matthew 28:19, but Paul’s point is that salvation is not required for a person to be saved. Further, Paul was rebuking the Corinthian believers for hyping baptism. That is the message of 1 Corinthians 1-3.

In summary, after a person responded to the gospel by believing in the Lord Jesus, then they were baptized. Baptism did not save them. It was not essential for salvation, but it was symbolic of a believer dying to self and having new life in Christ.

**1 Peter 3:21 - Baptism Now Saves You.* The last passage about baptism that some believe teaches that it is required for salvation occurs in 1 Peter 3:20-21.

... who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . 1

8. John B. Polhill. Acts. The New American Commentary. B & H Publishing Group. 1992. p. 399.

Peter 3:20-21 (NASB)

The apostle Peter is discussing Noah and that Noah's family was saved from the worldwide flood of water through the ark. Then in verse 21 Peter said, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you . . ." Peter clearly tells us that he was not referring to removing dirt from the flesh. That is, he was not referring to water baptism. That is, this passage is not referring to salvation by water baptism. Instead, he was referring to being saved by "a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Since only Christians have a good conscience, Peter is saying that believers are being rescued from this life by the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is symbolically the ark. We are saved through Him.

CONCLUSION. The salvation of our souls is one of the most important truths from God to us. It would be a disaster if God was inconsistent about what we must do to be saved. There are at least thirty-two passages in the New Testament dealing with salvation. Of these thirty-two passages, twenty-eight say that believing is required for salvation. Only three of the thirty-two passages refer to repentance and one refers to confession. Six passages refer to baptism.

We must ask the question. If baptism is required to be saved, then why is baptism mentioned only six times in the New Testament in verses that discuss how to be saved. They occur in these passages because Jesus told us to baptize new believers. So, we have discovered that baptism is not required in order to be saved.

In fact, Romans 4:4-5 teaches us that if a person attempts to earn their salvation by working, such as by being baptized in order to be saved, then they do not go to heaven. Instead,

they go to hell. God only gives salvation as a free gift (Romans 6:23). We cannot earn a free gift. We must simply believe that Jesus everything for us that is necessary for salvation. We must simply believe. Romans 4:4-5 says this,

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness . . . Romans 4:4-5 (NASB)

Notice that God says if someone works, they are owed a favor. That is, they are owed a wage or a salary. But the person who just believes in God is the one who is justified or saved. Salvation is simply a free gift. Salvation cannot be earned by a work such as baptism. God only justifies those who do not try to earn salvation. That is, if you try to earn your salvation then God will *not* give you salvation, because God only gives salvation as a free gift. You cannot earn a free gift. A believer is saved first by faith and faith alone, and then they can to be baptized.

We can praise God that salvation is free gift. Otherwise, everyone would go to hell. We can never be perfect enough to earn salvation. Salvation is by God's grace though faith in Christ alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10 (NASB)