

## Does Baptism Save?

Written by K B Napier  
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The simple answer is, no it does not. The claim, that baptism saves, is Romanist in theology and Arminian in thought, a thought that should not even cross the minds of genuine believers. (For an argument against the Roman position on this, see my criticism of the theology of Thomas Aquinas: 'Tom Got it Wrong').

Paul told his hearers that John came with the 'baptism of repentance'. This baptism did not save, but was an act *prior* to the repentance given by Jews to God for salvation. For example, in Acts 19:3-7, we are told that *"John verily baptised with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."* This Jewish repentance was rooted in the Jewish religion of the first (old) testament.

Very clearly, this shows us that John's baptism did not save, but pointed the people toward the Messiah and His salvation. Those who were baptised by John were brought to a realisation of their sin, but they then had to *"believe on him which should come after him"*. If Jesus came 'after' John, then those who repented *before* He came could not have received His salvation at that time. Therefore, salvation did not come through John's baptism. (The salvation known to Moses and all Jews who truly believed, is something different in mode but the same in principle and effect).

Those who had been baptised by John, later *"were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus."* The two baptisms are very different. Does the later baptism, in the name of Jesus Christ, bring salvation? No, it does not.

Christians are baptised *"into His death"* (Jesus Christ, e.g. Romans 6:3,4), the baptism denoting our new life, made alive from a state of death caused by sin. Baptism is said only to be a symbol of this new life, and is not the creator of new life; it highlights a new life that has *already been given*. Thus, it does not save, but merely reflects a life *already saved*.

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You will note that our 'old man' (sin) is "*crucified with him*" (verse 6). It is logical, that before we are dead we are crucified. One comes before the other. Therefore, the action that leads to new life comes *before* death (symbolised by baptism)! Our death to sin is the very point at which we come alive to Christ (salvation). One is not buried until he is dead, so we can deduce that as crucifixion brings new life, and baptism comes after crucifixion, we are *already* spiritually alive when we are baptised.

This new life is not created by us, or by our own actions, not even baptism, for new life is only given through and by Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. He passes on to those who are elect the benefits of His personal crucifixion and resurrection. Indeed, the symbol of baptism must, because of this, also include resurrection, for, as Paul says, Christ's death *without* His resurrection, is pointless, making our faith vain.

This fact is found to be true in Colossians 2:12 where we read that we are "*Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with (him)...*".

Does this mean we are thereby saved by baptism? No, it does not, as we find in 1 Peter 3:21. Curiously, this very same text is used as a proof text by those who claim baptism saves!

What does this text actually tell us? Does it say we are saved from death unto life by baptism? The person who says it does, displays a distinct lack of understanding, about true interpretation, about scripture, about salvation, and about Bible theology. In fact, the person who says it does, is being heretical.

Let us look at the text in its context:

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

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

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

The word for baptism in this text is *baptisma*. It can have a variety of meanings, including John’s baptism, calamities that overwhelm us, and the Christian *rite* of baptism, by which we confess our sins and faith in Christ Jesus. We cannot make such a confession unless we already have such faith, and faith is given as a gift to all who believe. That is, all who are *already* saved!

*Baptisma* is rooted in *baptizo*, which can mean to immerse something in order to change it (anything, including pickles in vinegar!), to overwhelm, to submerge (as a ship under water). It is not the same as *bapto* (e.g. superficial dipping, such as dipping cloth into a dye, which changes the colour only and not the substance or nature of the cloth). *Baptizo* means to dip once to clean and then a second time to effect a permanent change. Christian baptism is meant to *reflect* permanent change and union with Christ (not just intellectual assent) – it does not bring it about. *Baptisma*, not *baptizo*!

Baptism is a “like figure” of the saving of the ark. A ‘like figure’ is similar to something, *antitupos*, and points toward it, but is not itself the thing it points toward. Thus, it is *similar* but *not* ‘the same’. The word for ‘saved’ in verse 20 is different from the word used in verse 21. In verse 20 it is *diasozo*, meaning to stop someone from perishing/to save from danger/to rescue. Noah was, then, saved from drowning – the word does not mean eternal salvation.

So, if our baptism is a ‘like figure’, it is not going to save us eternally, but it saves us from entering into mortal danger, e.g. continuing sin, by causing us to think and stop. Our baptism is *sozo* – it keeps us safe and sound by rescuing us from danger, restoring us to a full and secure life. How do we know I am right? Well, the word, in context, tells us so, but this is reinforced by the qualifying remark itself, which says that baptism does *not* mean “the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God”!

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Baptism, then, does not save us eternally, but only shows others (and our own consciences) that we are *already* new creatures. In baptism we pin our colours to the mast and declare we *are* saved eternally and wish to show it in the *rite* of being immersed.

*“putting away”* is apothesis, which means putting off or discarding - in this case, sin. Scripture tells us this is done by God, not by any act we perform. We put away, *rhupos*, filth (sin), but this is brought about by Christ, not by us. We cast off *sarx*

– natural actions of the flesh; our nature as sinful men. The

*text*

tells us that baptism does NOT cause us to cast aside sin or to escape our natural carnal, fleshly desires!

Rather, baptism is *“the answer of a good conscience”* toward God. That is, *eperotema*, an earnest seeking to do what is right according to conscience:

*suneidesis*

, the activity of the soul distinguishing good and evil. This is brought into being by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, NOT by our baptism! That is what the text actually tells us, so how can anyone argue against it?

Let me repeat: baptism is a *symbol* of a change already effected, wrought by being made new creatures, and brought about *before* we are baptised. To insist otherwise, and to say that baptism is what saves us, or is part of salvation, is to lack proper understanding of salvation... the formulation is Arminian and Romanist, not spiritual, and denies the truth of God’s word.

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