

The Baptism Controversy

An every-verse examination of baptism

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(All quotes from the NRSV. Personal pronouns referring to divinity are not capitalized per this translation)

Must we be baptized to get into heaven? If so, must we be dunked under water, or is it okay to have water sprinkled on our heads? Should we have our children baptized as infants, or must we wait until they reach adulthood and let them choose to be baptized?

If we are to learn the answers to these questions, we must consult the Bible. And we must examine every baptism verse in the Bible. Don't assume, however, that doing so will clear up all confusion over the issue. There's a reason it exists.

Matthew 3:6-10, "...and they were baptized by him [John the Baptist] in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume and say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Context: After the Bible tells the story of Jesus' birth, it leads into the story of His ministry by telling of John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus. See a repeat of this conversation in Luke 3:7-10.

Analysis: According to John the Baptists' warning to the Pharisees, bearing fruit worthy of repentance is a key to baptism. Therefore, repentance is a key to baptism.

Baptism by itself is worthless. It's not for those who refuse to turn from their sinful ways. Before we may partake of a baptism acceptable to God, we must first renounce our sin and intend to obey God's will as revealed throughout the Bible.

The Pharisees are an interesting example of people unacceptable for baptism, since they were the religious leaders of their day. They were the rule enforcers who fasted and tithed while refraining from drinking and adultery. They would have exceeded the standards of righteousness in the eyes of many of today's devout, Evangelical Christians. Where they sinned so greatly, however, was in their arrogance, judgmentalism, and mercilessness—attitudes that run rampant among today's devout Evangelicals.

Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Context: John speaks to those who have come to him to be baptized.

Analysis: Again, John associates water baptism with repentance. He then speaks of a second baptism that can only come from Jesus: the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire.

Of course, the "fire" is not a literal fire. Rather, it is a term used to symbolize the power, majesty, and intensity of the Holy Spirit we receive.

Notice that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which comes from Jesus, is separate from the baptism of repentance, which comes from John the Baptist. While it's possible for both to happen simultaneously, it's not necessary that they do. Today, many Christians believe that we receive the Holy Spirit when we are baptized, but this quote provides no indication of that.

Matthew 3:13-17, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him

and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’”

Context: The Bible’s introduction of John the Baptist leads right into the story of his baptism of Jesus.

Analysis: Despite what I said in the analysis of Matthew 3:11, here we have an example of a baptism followed immediately by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. What we don’t know is whether or not Jesus is receiving the Holy Spirit for the first time or whether the Holy Spirit descends upon Him as a display of God’s approval, even though Jesus already possesses the Holy Spirit.

Most Christians would agree with the latter interpretation, because they believe in the Trinity to the extent that Jesus is God in the flesh and, therefore, cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Context: This quote is known to many as the Great Commission, in which Jesus, after His resurrection, instructs His disciples to spread the gospel to the world.

Analysis: Are we to baptize entire nations and make disciples of them, or are we to baptize individuals *from* all nations?

Most of us today would probably choose the latter interpretation. However, when the nations of Europe converted to Christianity in the early Middle Ages, many of them did force baptism upon entire nations of people. The mentality in those days was that an entire society had to hold the same religious belief. Therefore, Christianity was not an individual choice but a national mandate. Baptism was a part of that mandate.

This national religion mentality continued until the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and other fighting among Christians defeated the will of those who insisted upon a single theology for an entire nation. Out of their religious war fatigue came the concept of denominations – the idea that people with differing Christian beliefs could live together

in a community. The denominational structure relied upon personal choice and made it a driving force in Christianity, like it was in the early days of the church.

Of course, most people in recent centuries remained in the denominations of their families and perceived themselves to be Christians because they belonged to a Christian church. In the past couple centuries, however, Evangelical Christianity has popularized the notion of faith-in-Christ being a personal choice that has nothing to do with church membership or having grown up in a church. The personal choice to be baptized then accompanies this personal choice of faith in Christ. That's why many of us today see this verse as a requirement to spread the gospel to people of all nations rather than as a requirement to force entire nations to be baptized.

Mark 1:4-8, “John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

Context: The first chapter of Mark parallels the third chapter of Matthew, telling the story of John the Baptist.

Analysis: Again, in verse 8, we see that John’s water baptism was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” This verse lends additional support to the inseparability of baptism and repentance.

When the Bible says that “all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him,” it doesn’t literally mean every single person in the city was baptized by him. In fact, many religious leaders opposed John’s ministry. It’s common for the Bible to use the word *all* to mean *many* or *all kinds*. For example, this verse may indicate that people from all walks of life came to John for baptism. Or it may simply mean that a great number of people came out to him – so many that it seemed like all the people.

It's interesting to note that this quote says the people came out to John "confessing their sins." This is something we don't practice today. It's easy to see why we don't. It would be embarrassing for most of us to confess our greatest wrongs in front of those witnessing our baptism. Naturally, many of us would hold back our darkest secrets. However, it's inspiring to see that those baptized by John were so repentant that they didn't care if everyone knew about their past sins.

Mark 16:16, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned."

Context: Jesus sends the disciples out into the world to spread the gospel. He follows these words with descriptions of signs believers will share, such as picking up serpents and drinking poison without harm.

Analysis: Baptists and other Christians who insist that adult baptism is necessary to obtain eternal life quote this verse more than any other to support their belief. Most Christians, when asked to give the biblical requirements for salvation, quote verses instructing us to believe in Christ. But this verse adds a second requirement to believing in Christ—baptism.

However, if we read the last part of this verse, it says that "the one who does not believe will be condemned." It does not say that the one who fails to be baptized will be condemned. Therefore, we must conclude that this verse fails to damn the unbaptized.

What hurts this verse's credibility most, however, is that the earliest New Testament manuscripts do not contain verses 9-20. Apparently, these verses were tacked on to the end of Mark a couple centuries after it was written. Today, most Bibles include these verses for tradition's sake, but they sometimes go as far as to separate it from the rest of Mark, so that people think twice before taking these verses as the Word of God. Therefore, it's best that we not use verse 16 as the foundation of our baptism theology.

Luke 3:3-6, "He [John the Baptist] went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'The voice of the one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be

filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth; and all the flesh shall see the salvation of God.””

Context: Like Matthew and Mark, Luke also tells the story of John the Baptist.

Analysis: Yet again, repentance and baptism are intertwined. This quote, however, calls this a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” It shouldn’t alarm most of us that repentance is for the forgiveness of sins; nonetheless, this is the first verse to define repentance in this manner. Some might argue, however, that this passage implies that baptism is also needed for the forgiveness of sins.

The prophecy from Isaiah gives us added understanding of the purpose of baptism. It exists to “prepare the way of the Lord.” For years, I understood this to mean that John the Baptist had to begin his ministry first so that Jesus could then be baptized by him. However, this passage may also mean that a baptism of repentance prepares us to receive Jesus. Naturally, most of us choose to submit to Jesus before we are baptized. But to know Him intimately, we need a baptism of repentance to lead the way.

Luke 7:28-30, “I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.’ (And all the people who heard this, including the tax collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John’s baptism. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves.)”

Context: Jesus speaks to a crowd about John the Baptist. He goes on to explain how both His and John’s ministries were rejected by the religious leaders of the day.

Analysis: Here we have proof that not “all” people in Jerusalem were baptized by John, because many of the Pharisees and lawyers resided in Jerusalem, yet this passage says most of them refused to be baptized by him.

Luke goes out of his way to tell us that the violent, thieving tax collectors, who were seen in the eyes of the people and the religious leaders as most evil of all, received John’s baptism of repentance, but the religious leaders were too arrogant over their righteousness and spiritual knowledge to allow themselves baptized by a simple man from the wilderness.

Luke 12:49-50, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!”

Context: Appears to be unrelated to quotes which precede and follow it.

Analysis: At this point, Jesus had already been baptized by John. Here he uses the word *baptism* as a metaphor for His trial and crucifixion. We will learn later how baptism symbolizes our being buried with Christ in earthly death and being resurrected in new life.

John 1:24-27, “Now they had been sent by the Pharisees. They asked him, ‘Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?’ John answered them, ‘I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.’”

Context: John the Baptist is questioned about his identity before baptizing Jesus.

Analysis: The Pharisees wanted to know by whose authority John baptized others. In their eyes, John had to be someone special, someone they respected, or someone who had credentials, in order to carry out God’s work. John answered by telling not who he was, but the purpose of his baptism. He then pointed to Jesus as the authority for his ministry, but this answer failed to satisfy the Pharisees, since they saw Jesus as a nobody, too.

John 1:31, 33, “I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel...I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

Context: John the Baptists testifies about his experience baptizing Jesus.

Analysis: How did baptism begin? It all started with a revelation from God to John the Baptist. He received no human instruction to baptize. It wasn’t Jesus’ who told him to baptize. Nonetheless, God worked His revelation to John together with His plan for Jesus’ ministry.

It's interesting to think about the fact that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus after baptism. This seems to imply that Jesus didn't possess the Holy Spirit until this point in time, but that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were one throughout His ministry. This passage alone could spark hours of conversation about exactly how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to one another and work together. But I'm not going to get into all of that, because it's a subject that none of us in this world can fully understand, and because our understanding of it has no impact on how we live our daily lives.

John 3:22-24, “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized...”

Context: This famous chapter explains what it means to be born again or born anew.

Analysis: This verse seems to say that Jesus baptized others. For some reason, it seems odd that Jesus would baptize people directly. Who should be so privileged that the Son of God himself would baptize them? Wouldn't everybody rush to Jesus rather than the others for baptism? Then again, at this point, people may not have realized that Jesus was the Messiah. They may have thought He was on the same level as John the Baptist.

John 4:1-3, “Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—he left Judea and started back to Galilee.”

Context: Jesus then goes on to speak with the woman at Jacob's well.

Analysis: This verse seems to say that Jesus did not baptize people personally. Either way, it probably doesn't matter too much.

We see from this verse and others that baptism was a huge part of both Jesus' and John the Baptists' ministries. This public expression of repentance and faith had its dangers, as it drew the attention of the disapproving leaders of the religious establishment. Then again, public expressions of Christian faith have been dangerous at many times throughout history. That may be part of why it's so important that baptism be

public. Taking such a risk is evidence of just how committed we are to Christ. If we refuse to express our faith publicly out of fear of the reaction of others, then we probably don't have much faith.

Acts 1:4-5, “While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit many days from now.’”

Context: Luke opens Acts by picking up where the Gospels left off.

Analysis: Here, Jesus foretells the coming of the Pentecost. As we saw early in the Gospels, John foretold how his baptism would pave the way for Jesus' baptism by the Holy Spirit. Here, the fulfillment of that promise is just days away.

Acts 2:38, “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord God calls to him.’”

Context: Peter speaks to the crowd on the original day of Pentecost.

Analysis: Yet again, the repentance comes first, and then the baptism. According to Peter, this baptism is to be in the name of Christ. Why repent and be baptized in the name of Christ? “...so that your sins will be forgiven...” Here's the big question: Are we forgiven because we repent in Christ's name, or are we forgiven because we repent *and* are baptized in Christ's name? In other words, do we have to do both to be forgiven?

Of course, Peter goes on to say that those who do these things will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That prompts the question: Must we first repent and be baptized before we can receive the Holy Spirit, or do we receive the Holy Spirit simply for believing in Christ, as many have said we do?

Notice that I'm not answering any of these questions. We have to look at the remaining baptism verses in the Bible before we can come to a conclusion.

Then Peter says that this promise is also for the children of those at Pentecost, as well as for those who are far away. This promise for the children tempts us to think that our repentance and baptism might cover our children as well as us, and that they don't even have to repent and be baptized to be forgiven. However, the fact that Peter goes on to say that this promise is also for those who are far away negates this thinking, because it makes no sense that repentance and baptism of one person would cover random people thousands of miles away. Peter is saying nothing more than that his words to the crowd don't just apply to them, but to all people.

Acts 8:13, “Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

Context: Simon was a popular magician who dazzled the people with his magic.

Analysis: There's not much to analyze about baptism here. It's simply another example of baptism following belief in Christ.

Acts 8:14-17, “Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

Context: In verse 18, Simon the magician tries to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John and receives a strong rebuke.

Analysis: This passage delivers a blow to those who say that we receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon believing in Christ, because these Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit after believing. Also, they didn't receive it immediately after baptism like Jesus or the people at Pentecost did. Does this mean that some who believe and are baptized never receive the Holy Spirit? Would these Samaritans have never received it had Peter and John never laid hands on them?

To answer these questions thoroughly, we would have to get into a deep discussion about the Holy Spirit. Contrary to popular theology, it's possible that different people have different amounts of the Holy Spirit at different times. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes and goes for people like Saul and Samson. Whenever Samson did something miraculous, it was because the Holy Spirit entered Him. Most theology today says the Holy Spirit that we Christians possess is constant. But it may be that all of us have enough of the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ, but that there are times that we receive heavy doses of the Holy Spirit in order to experience God's power or to carry out His will.

Acts 8:36-38, "As they [Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch] were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him."

Context: The Holy Spirit directs Philip to the eunuch just as he puzzled over a biblical text.

Analysis: As holy as baptism is, it doesn't require any special kind of water. Many churches use so-called holy water. But Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch used the closest water available. Water is water. It all works the same. God has no desire to make us go through pointless, tedious rituals to acquire special water for baptism.

Acts 9:18, "And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength."

Context: The scales mentioned here covered Paul's eyes after he had been blinded by the light during his conversion experience. Ananias then came to him and baptized him.

Analysis: This passage gives us a sense of urgency in baptism, because Paul is baptized before he even bothers to eat. He's weak from malnutrition (or from being struck down by God), yet his baptism is so urgent that he puts off eating so that he may be baptized first. Wow!

All of the baptisms we find in the Bible appear to occur the same day that a person comes to faith in Christ. Nowhere in the Bible is a believer's baptism planned in advance, as baptisms are today. Biblical baptisms all appear to be spontaneous; they're the equivalent of an alter call and baptism all-in-one.

Must we follow this same format for baptism today? It's difficult to say. We can argue that we must conduct ourselves in the same manner as the early church, but the Bible never requires us to emulate the early church or anyone else (except for Jesus) in the Bible. It only requires us to follow the commands of God.

It's possible that the disciples conducted same day baptisms because they were on the move and didn't have churches established for people to come back to. Also, there were so many people coming to Christ simultaneously that scheduling everyone's baptisms for the future would have been a nightmare. These scheduling difficulties may have discouraged new believers from being baptized. The disciples may have decided that the best time to baptize new believers was when they were right in front of them.

Would it really make any difference if we replaced pre-planned baptisms with same-day baptisms? Are pre-planned baptisms more effective than spontaneous ones? Would same-day baptisms discourage people from confessing Christ because they didn't bring their swimsuits (it's not like they knew they were going to believe in Jesus that day)? Of course, new believers in Jesus' day didn't bring swimsuits; they just went home in wet clothes. If we switch to same-day baptisms, it might all be pointless and discouraging to those who would believe in Christ and be baptized. Then again, maybe same-day baptisms are what God prefers. I can't give a definitive answer on this one, but it's an idea worth kicking around.

Acts 10:44-48, "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days."

Context: Despite Jesus' earlier teachings, His twelve disciples still believed that He had come only for the salvation of the Jews and not for people of other nations and religions. Through a vision, God led Peter to Cornelius, a Gentile, who received the Holy Spirit out of faith in Christ, just like the Jewish Christians did.

Analysis: So much for the idea that we must first be baptized in order to receive the Holy Spirit. These Gentiles not only received the Holy Spirit before baptism, but they received a heavy dose of it, speaking in tongues, etc.

It was necessary, in this instance, for the Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit in dramatic fashion as a sign to Peter that God had chosen them as Christians. Peter and the other disciples had believed up to this point that Jesus had come only for the Jews. The Gentiles speaking in tongues proved to him that Christianity was for people of all races and nations. Peter and the other disciples needed to understand this so that they would spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire, rather than stay in Judea to preach it, as they had intended to do up to this point in time.

Acts 16:14-15, "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us.

Context: Paul and his counterparts travel from place to place on a missionary journey.

Analysis: Notice that Lydia's household is baptized with her. This most likely means her children were baptized. What we don't know is whether her children chose to believe in Jesus, or whether they were baptized because of their mother's faith.

It's possible that baptism may have been like circumcision in this regard. When a person committed to God's Old Testament covenant, he had all of his sons circumcised as well as himself. Circumcision was a symbol of that particular covenant with God. In the New Testament, circumcision was no longer required, but baptism became the symbol of the New Testament covenant. Everyone who believed in Jesus was baptized as a symbol of that belief and covenant with God through Christ.

Since the descendants of Old Testament believers were circumcised as a result of their fathers' decisions of faith, could it be that the descendants of New Testament believers were baptized as a result of their parents' decisions of faith, too? If they were, were they baptized again as adults despite having already been baptized as children? Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't answer these questions.

Acts 16:30-33, "Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' They spoke the word of the Lord to him and all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay."

Context: When an earthquake frees Paul and Silas from prison, they decide to convert the jailer and return to prison rather than run for their freedom, which would have left the jailer responsible and likely punished by death.

Analysis: The words, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," indicate that even salvation covers the children of a believer. This message is contrary to modern theology which says that salvation can only result from a personal decision of faith. To explore this conundrum further, we'd have to examine every salvation verse in the Bible. But this study is about baptism, not salvation, so we'll just have to move on.

Here we see that Paul and Silas shared the gospel with the entire household, so this leads us to conclude that all who were old enough to understand it chose to believe and be baptized. However, we don't know for a fact that everyone in the household believed. It may be that only some believed, but all were baptized as a symbol of their father's covenant with God through Christ.

Let's imagine that there were seven people in the jailer's household and seven people in Lydia's household. What are the odds that all fourteen of them instantly made a personal decision to convert to Christianity? It's much more likely that some of them didn't believe than that all of them believed. However, unanimous belief is certainly possible.

These stories of Lydia and the jailer may indicate that infant baptism is God's will and that we need not be baptized as adults if we were baptized as children. Everyone else baptized in Acts did so out of a personal decision of faith, because none of them had been raised as Christians, since Christianity was brand new.

Since the book of Acts covers a period of only a few decades, it never shows us how baptism worked for children born to someone who was already a believer. Even the stories of Lydia and the jailer only tell us of existing children. What would have happened had either of these families bore more children later? Would they have been baptized as a symbol of their parents' covenant? Or would they have waited until making a personal decision of faith later in life to be baptized? Unfortunately, while many of us have strong opinions on this, none of us can say for sure.

Acts 18:8, "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized."

Context: Paul preaches the gospel in Corinth.

Analysis: Here we see an entire household believing in Christ, despite the odds against everyone believing with no dissenters. Should we, as a result of their belief, assume that Lydia's and the jailer's families all believed in the same manner? Or should we conclude that since Acts 18:8 specifies that the whole household believed, while Acts 16 does not, that only Crispus' entire household believed, not Lydia's and the jailer's households?

Acts 19:1-7, While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They answered, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had

laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them.”

Context: The story pretty much tells it.

Analysis: Here we find the Bible’s first double baptism. The first was a baptism of repentance from John the Baptist, and it looked forward to Christ. The second was apparently nothing more than a baptism in Christ’s name, since these Corinthians had already repented when baptized by John.

It wasn’t until these Corinthians believed in Jesus and were baptized in His name that they received the Holy Spirit—more evidence that a person may only receive the Holy Spirit after believing in Jesus.

Acts 22:16, “And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.”

Context: Paul recounts the story of his conversion and how he came to be baptized.

Analysis: This is the only biblical instance in which baptism is said to wash away sin. This wording makes it sound as though sin remains if we are not baptized. Those who insist that baptism is a requirement for salvation probably love this verse. But is it enough to prove their point? Or are the words, “have your sins washed away,” nothing more than symbolic of God’s forgiveness of those who repent in Jesus’ name?

Romans 6:1-8, “What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin would be destroyed, and we might no longer be a slave to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin.”

Context: Paul explains how we are not to abuse God's grace by choosing to sin. We are to avoid sin, since we died to it when we submitted to Christ and symbolized the commitment in baptism.

Analysis: Those who insist on baptism by submersion (dunking) rely on these verses for support, because these verses imply that being under water is similar to being underground in burial. This watery burial is symbolic of our dying to our old sinful ways.

These verses also support Baptist theology by saying that we are buried with Christ in death in order to then "walk in newness of life." This newness of life is eternal life. Does this mean that we *must* be "buried with Him by baptism into death" in order to "walk in the newness of life?" Or does it mean that baptism is symbolic of our repentance in which we die to our old ways and "walk in the newness of life" in Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:12-15, 17, "What I mean is each of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? 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 can say that you were baptized in my name...For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power."

Context: Paul expresses concern over Christians dividing over which early church leader they favored.

Analysis: In the early Middle Ages, church leaders debated over whether the credibility of a sacrament, such as baptism or marriage, was dependent upon the person who performed it. For example, if a priest was caught in adultery, did that nullify all of the baptisms he had performed?

Few of us today would answer, "Yes." to that question. And this Bible quote, to some extent, supports our view. Paul indicates that it doesn't matter who performs the baptism, because everyone is baptized into the name of Christ and nobody else.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were

baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

Context: Paul warns Christians to avoid the sinful ways of the Israelites who rebelled against God by worshipping the golden calf.

Analysis: Since baptism didn't exist in the Old Testament, the Israelites were not literally baptized into Moses. This terminology must be symbolic of their covenant with God through Moses, which looked forward to the covenant that God's people would one day have with God through Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:29, "Otherwise, what will those people do who receive baptism on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?"

Context: Paul refutes those in and around the church who claim there's no resurrection of the dead.

Analysis: The practice of being baptized for those already dead is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible and is inconsistent with modern-day salvation theology. It suggests that we can accept Christ and be baptized in the name of those who never had the opportunity to accept Him. Let's not forget, however, that these dead folks never had an opportunity to hear of Christ, so their situation differs from ours today. Most people who pass away in our culture had a chance to choose Jesus when they were alive.

Some say that these people received baptism for those who believed but died before they could be baptized. This is unlikely, however, since all biblical baptisms appear to take place the day of conversion.

It's worth asking why people would bother to be baptized on behalf of those who passed. Since Paul explains that doing so would be pointless if there were no such thing as resurrection, we must conclude that they were baptized so that the dead could be resurrected, and that these deceased people could not have been resurrected without these acts of baptism. Therefore, these verses lend further support to the Baptist view that baptism is necessary for salvation.

To delve into this issue further would lead us into salvation theology more than it would baptism theology, so I'll stop here.

Ephesians 2:12-13, “In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision on Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”

Context: Paul goes on to warn of giving into man-made religious rules that burden the believer but miss the point of Christianity altogether.

Analysis: This passage is the foundation for the idea that baptism replaces circumcision as a symbol of our covenant with God. Our circumcision is no longer a physical one, but a spiritual one, that is now symbolized by the physical act of baptism. Through this baptism, we die to our old selves and are resurrected by God as new creatures in Christ. This is not a resurrection that occurs after the death of our earthly bodies; rather, it is a spiritual resurrection during this life, in which we are reunited with God in a new relationship, reversing the separation between God and man that resulted from Adam's fall. After our earthly lives end, then God will literally resurrect our bodies, just like He resurrected Jesus.

1 Corinthians 18:18-21, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

Context: Peter encourages Christians to be willing to suffer for having done good rather than for having done bad.

Analysis: The words, “And baptism...now saves you,” gives us our fifth verse that indicates baptism is required for salvation. The other four verses were found in Mark

16, Acts 22, Romans 6, and 1 Corinthians 15. That's more support for Baptist theology than I expected. Conducting this study has made me more of a Baptist than I was before. The Bible proves that baptism is a must for every Christian.

However, I'm still uncertain about whether to baptize children as a symbol of the covenant, and whether these children should be baptized of their own accord as adults. Since the Bible leaves us hanging on this issue, it mustn't be important that we understand it perfectly.

My personal recommendation is to do both. I've noticed, just from people I've known in my life, that those baptized as children tend to stray less from God than those who aren't, even if those who aren't are children of devout Christians. Some might argue that we shouldn't have two baptisms in a lifetime, but I've yet to see what harm it does. I've known numerous people, including myself, who did both, and we seem to have turned out just fine. There's no biblical indication that the second baptism reverses the first.

As we conclude this study, you may find yourself disappointed. Most Every-Verse method studies give us clear answers. But this one gave us few of those. That's why there's so much confusion and disagreement over baptism today. Nonetheless, you now have a better understanding of what the whole Bible says about baptism, and that's never a bad thing.

(To learn more, visit www.biblicalfreedom.com and pick up a copy of *Biblical Freedom from Religious Oppression* by K. Scott Schaeffer)