

## DOES BAPTISM SAVE?

### THE SACRAMENTAL BAPTISM TEXTS

Here are all the “proof” texts for baptism in water being a sacrament, that is, a ritual that magically changes you to make you holier and live better. It makes you ready to go to Heaven to be with God should you die.

\* Acts 2:38 says, “They said to Peter and the rest of the apostles (special messengers), Brethren what shall we do? And Peter answered them, Repent (change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner selves instead of rejecting it) and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of and release from your sins”.

You can need repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins without baptism being the cause of the forgiving. If you are saved by repentance you will make a public expression of it by being baptised. If you don’t, your repentance was false.

Does the verse mean this? The word “for” in it is eis which can be translated because of (pages, 27-29, 12 Church of Christ Doctrines Compared with the Holy Scriptures) or with a view to or as a result of (page 428, When Critics Ask). Even if eis is for, this verse still does not prove that baptism has any power to forgive sins apart from its being a petition for pardon and a revealing of the penitence that is in one’s heart. He said baptism in the name, that is, the authority, of Jesus meaning baptism to express a change of life for sinners eager to mend their ways for stubborn sinners can’t be baptised for this would be unauthorised so they are not baptised in the name even if somebody says “I baptise you in Jesus’ name” over them while immersing them.

It is replied that Peter said that we must repent and be immersed for pardon. The one particle for (eis) cannot express both for and because of according to those who support baptismal remission of sins (page 10, Is It Necessary For You To Be Baptised To Be Saved?). But maybe what Peter said if you observe the commas, was repent, and be baptised, for pardon? The punctuation which was not in the Greek for it was not used in those days changes the meaning. The punctuation means you can leave out the “and be baptised” which will make the passage say repent for pardon. Another possibility leaves out the punctuation and comes up with a structure of meaning like this. “Go into the bus, and take a seat, and you will get to Paris”, does not mean that sitting is necessary for making the journey to Paris and the verse is the same. Or Peter could have meant that they should get their sins forgiven by repentance and be baptised because of the remission of sins for he commanded repentance that forgives so the forgiveness was already there by implication for they had to repent before and during and in baptism. This avoids the problem of eis meaning for and because of at the one time. This is perhaps the most plausible understanding of the verse. It is futile to point to Acts 3:19 which says that we must repent so that (eis) our sins will be pardoned and say that eis means because of for it can’t mean it here. The meaning of eis depends on the context.

The book of Acts (10) says that the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit descended on Cornelius and other pagans just for believing the gospel and they weren’t even baptised! This shows what the right translation must be. There Peter says that nobody can forbid water that they should not be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles have received him (verse 47). It shows the apostles were not baptising these people to give them the Holy Spirit but because they had already received the Holy Spirit. It shows that being born of the Holy Spirit is not the same as being baptised.

If Peter’s utterance in Acts 2:38 did teach Catholic doctrine it wouldn’t mean the Bible teaches it for Acts is only reporting what Peter said and it does not say that the sayings in it are infallible. (It could be just the same when Acts 10 told us that Peter and the apostles erred in their teaching against eating “unclean” food.) The author could have been inspired to record it but that does not mean it is God’s word any more than God inspiring the author of Genesis 3 to write down what the Devil told Adam and Eve means that the Devil was telling the truth.

I don’t think it would be going too far to say that Peter may have meant spirit baptism and not water at all.

\* Acts 22:16. Paul was instructed by Ananias to wash away his sins in the waters of baptism by being immersed.

Many Christians instruct us that we should take this verse literally to be on the safe side and that this proves that this is its meaning. But it is safer not to for God would tell us if he meant it literally and how could water literally wash away sins and how could we think the Bible would suppose we could be silly enough to suppose that it could? The Bible says that some were saved though not baptised so we will be okay if we don’t get baptised.

Some say that since Paul already believed in Christ by then and got his sins forgiven in baptism that baptism must be

essential for salvation and faith is not enough. But Paul could still have had a sacramental baptism to wash away his sins after he got saved. Catholics believe that perfect contrition removes sins but that does not stop them going to confession to be absolved though it is not needed.

Ananias called Paul brother before the baptism implying that Paul was already believed to be a member of the Church of Christ. It is objected that Peter and Paul both called their enemies brethren. But that was because they were all from the one race. But Ananias was a Damascus man and the Bible never says he was a Jew and Ananias gave Paul the Holy Spirit before baptism so in all probability Paul was considered a true Christian before he was baptised and Ananias meant he was his brother in Christ and in the Church. Ananias told Paul to wash away his sins in baptism by calling on God's name meaning that he was to make the waters symbolically wash away his sins by repentant prayer. Christians say he could have done that without baptising him but Ananias according to Paul in Acts 22 gave him no time to do anything else.

Even sacramentalists say that washing sins is symbolism for it is God who removes sins not water. So, water baptism saves from sin in so far as it is a prayer of repentance. It saves not because it is a sacrament but because it is a prayer that God hears.

It could still literally mean that water washes away sin for the Bible is a superstitious book but we will be charitable and not lay much weight on this.

Baptism could wash away sin if it was a sign that one intends that past sins will not be repeated even if they have been forgiven some time before. This seems to be the true meaning for Paul had a few days to turn to God for the remission of all his sins and would have already been clean when baptised. Paul says that God's grace changed him when he revealed Jesus to him in a vision (Galatians 1:15,16).

\* Romans 6:1-6. Immersion is immersion into Christ's death and into Christ. We are buried so that we might rise out of it to a new life just like Jesus was buried in the tomb and rose to a new life.

Nowhere in that chapter does the word water appear. In baptism in the Spirit we bury and immerse ourselves in the Spirit and die to our sinfulness and rise up in the Spirit. Jesus died and rose in the presence of the Spirit and the chapter says the same happens to us in baptism.

The opinion of some is, "If it meant water baptism then it must be a sacrament when it puts us into Christ. If we were already forgiven we could not be put into Christ. Nothing else in the chapter indicates a sacramental interpretation." Baptism is a sign of leaving the Christless life behind and entering Christ in the sense of taking a stand for him. Even if you are saved by faith alone and have entered Christ as regards being numbered among the saved you will enter Christ in another sense whenever you turn away from sin by publicly being baptised. Paul may have meant joining Christ in this second sense. The people he was writing to would have taken this meaning if they knew that baptism was not a sacrament.

Being baptised into Christ's death infers nothing sacramental. We can be united to our father's death by doing good to honour his memory.

\* Galatians 3:27. This verse tells us that baptism is into Christ. This is supposed to say that baptism makes the spirit of Jesus live in you. You are placed by it into the presence of Christ.

The word for into is eis which is translated unto in many other places. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, the Bible declares that Israel was baptised into or unto (eis) Moses by the cloud and the sea they crossed. The verse means that these "baptisms" made Israel one in mind and heart with Moses not that they made Moses dwell spiritually inside them. It is the same with the Galatians verse.

\* 1 Corinthians 12:13. "For by [means of the personal agency of] one [Holy] Spirit we were all, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, baptized [and by baptism united together] into one body, and all made to drink of one [Holy] Spirit".

This refers to Spirit baptism. All Christians agree that one can go through a water baptism with an insincere heart and not receive any grace. It is worthless and invalid when the candidate is insincere. But this says that all who are baptised drink of the Spirit so it cannot have water baptism in mind.

\* Colossians 2:12, 13. "You were buried with Him in [your] baptism, in which you were also raised with Him [to a new life] through [your] faith in the working of God [as displayed] when He raised him up from the dead. And you who were dead in trespasses...[God] brought to life".

This links the graces to the faith that accompanies baptism not the baptism itself. The burial and resurrection are symbolic for you are buried in baptism and rise again like Jesus was buried and rose again.

There are no miracle graces inferred by saying that a person dies to the old life in baptism and rises to a new one. Some may say that if you have been forgiven before it you have died and you cannot die again. If valid, this teaching would mean that you die once and only in baptism, making it essential for forgiveness. There is no sense in going that far for death is a symbol of sinfulness. The Christian dies and rises all the time. But with the interpretation it is inferred that once you are saved you are irrevocably saved forever.

\* Titus 3:5 claims that baptism is the water of regeneration. It may call it that because it represents rebirth or because it is a cry for deliverance from sin. It is birth to a new life when performed in public for it is telling others not to harm your fellowship with Jesus and God and that you are serious about putting your old life behind you.

## THE ULTIMATE PROOF TEXT ?

John 3:5. When having a chat with Nicodemus, Jesus claimed that only a person born of water and the Holy Spirit could go to Heaven, “Unless a man is born of water and [even] the Spirit, he cannot [ever] enter the Kingdom of God”. The water need not be real water - but water as in a symbol of washing from sin for the word Spirit may be really wind in the original Greek. The “Spirit” translation is just a guess (page 135, All One Body – Why Don’t We Agree? Or read the notes in the New American Bible for this passage. In its dictionary – look up SPIRIT – it says that the word pneuma means spirit and several other things.) Water and wind are emblems of the Holy Spirit so Jesus may be saying that we should be born of the Spirit and not of literal water plus the Spirit.

In the First Epistle of John we read that Jesus Christ came by water and blood. This is an assertion of his human nature intended to oppose those who thought his humanity was an illusion. The water is commonly thought to mean the water of baptism in the Jordan when Jesus was baptised. But John never says that Jesus was baptised. The blood is thought to be the blood of the cross. The water and the blood probably refer to the water and blood of childbirth. Jesus being baptised in water would not prove that he was a man and not an illusion. We read that he came by the blood. That does not read like it refers to the blood shed on the cross.

Thus we see that John used water as an emblem for birth.

## NOT ESSENTIAL FOR SALVATION

The Anglo-Catholics, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics, Christadelphians, Mormons, Church of Christ and Jehovah’s Witnesses all blackmail people into the baptismal waters. Their tenet is that baptism is necessary for salvation. Baptism makes a person a member which is why they so eager to threaten.

Some of these groups regard baptism as a non-sacramental rite that God requires as a qualification for entry into Heaven or Paradise. So, one does not have to suppose that baptism has the power to magically change people to believe that it is the only way to God. Their doctrine of the necessity of baptism comes from Mark 16:16, John 3:5 and 1 Peter 3:21. The other verses on baptism speak of its benefits but that does not mean it is necessary for eternal happiness.

Mark 16:16. Here Jesus says that whoever believes “and is baptized” will be saved but whoever does not believe will not. This no more proves that baptism is essential for salvation than, “Get on your bicycle and put on your helmet and you will be in town by six o clock”, proves that wearing a helmet is necessary for getting to town. If the saved person will go to be baptised if they are really saved then that could be the reason why Jesus said those who believe and are baptised will be saved.

It is probable that Mark’s gospel does not intend to mean that Jesus asked for people to accept water baptism at all. The only baptism Jesus commanded in this gospel was baptism with the Holy Ghost. If the author really meant to say that baptism was required for salvation then he may have meant this baptism which John the Baptist said was different from baptism in water (Mark 1:8).

When Jesus added that whoever does not believe will not be saved instead of saying that whoever does not believe and is not baptised it shows that belief was his chief thought. Baptism as a statement of belief was related to belief which was why it was mentioned.

Jesus said he who does not believe will be condemned. There was no need for Jesus to say that he who does not believe and is not baptised will be condemned because he who does not believe will not be baptised anyway.

1 Peter 3:21. Just as eight people were saved by water, baptism “which is a figure [of their deliverance, does now also save you]” but “not by the removing of outward body filth [bathing], but by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear

conscience" in the sight of the Lord. The key to understanding what this means is in the assertion that baptism is a symbol of the preservation of the eight from evil by the waters which destroyed all that could corrupt them. Baptism saves from sin because it appeals to God for pardon and deliverance from sin and begs the Church to function as a barrier against for you for you are a serious Christian and to provide moral support in the face of temptation. Baptism is not said to save from sin in any other sense. The notion that it actually forgives sin is absent. Peter is speaking of those adults who receive baptism with the proper motives, repentance and trust and faith for even sacramentalists agree that without these baptism is invalid though they make an exception of infants. He says that valid baptism saves for it appeals to God for a pure conscience. This might mean that it saves in the same way prayer for pardon saves for it is a prayer for pardon. The words do not save nor does the rite but what is expressed by them does if it is sincere. Prayer is an attitude expressed by words but not the words which is why saying prayers while thinking of something else is no good. Baptism has no power in itself. It is the repentance it expresses that saves not it.

Paul wrote that baptism saves BY the resurrection of Jesus meaning that it is a cry to God for salvation to a new life with the risen Jesus and for him to resurrect the candidate to a new life of holiness.

If infant water baptism were allowed the verse would not say the rite is for making the person beg for a clean conscience.

The Peter verse tells us that like Noah and his mates were saved by the flood from evil for the flood wiped out evil on earth we are saved by a baptismal bath that does not remove physical stain but cleans the soul for it involves repenting. The people were not baptised in the flood for they were in the ark and Peter says the same thing happens with this other bath. He goes on to say that this other bath does not remove physical stain so it is not a bath of water but a bath in the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit.

Some say that when Peter said baptism saves not by washing physical dirt away that he didn't have water baptism in mind at all. He could speak that way whether he had water baptism in his mind or baptism in the spirit.

When Peter was asked by his converts what they should do he told them to repent and be baptised in water (Acts 2:37). They queried because "they were stung (cut) to the heart". They desired to be put right with God as Peter's answer proves. He would not have baptised them if he suspected that they did not.

Peter instructed them to repent and be baptised to show it for salvation. But when baptism expresses repentance it can save just like kissing a relic to express sorrow can. Peter is not necessarily saying that baptism is magic and can wash away sins. It is repentance and God that do that. How could Peter see baptism as necessary for salvation when in Acts 16:31 Paul and Silas told the jailer to believe in Jesus when he asked them what he must do to be saved and never mentioned baptism? Believe means have faith and faith as understood by the people includes repentance. The jailer was baptised in that same hour but that proves nothing. If baptism was necessary for salvation and they could do it fast then why did they not tell him to believe and be baptised to be saved? It would be like telling a man to use the gun without telling him to load it first when he seeks your permission to shoot and have the bullets at your fingertips. You wouldn't do that unless you had no bullets. Similarly Peter would not have spoken the way he did unless baptism were just optional.

But if baptism is nothing but a way of showing you are changing your life then why did Peter command it instead of leaving the expression optional? Because baptism was popular among the Jews. He wanted the pagans he converted to undergo the same rite for that and because it was making a public statement for Christ.

Religions which teach that obedience is required for salvation will have to hold that baptism is necessary for they say God commands it. But then the New Testament never says that obedience is a condition for salvation. It never specifically says that we must be baptised in water. It can be subjectively necessary for salvation but it can never be objectively necessary though the Catholic Church vehemently denies that.

In Bible Christian theology which supposes that water baptism is commanded by God, water baptism is necessary for salvation only in the following sense. God commands baptism. If you are saved you will obey God and be baptised for being saved results in good works. It is indirectly necessary but not directly necessary. It is really obedience to God that saves rather than baptism.

If baptism saved the Bible would command it. Even if the verses that the Church says refers to water baptism, did actually do so, we still don't see any command in them. They might be simply recommendations.

The doctrine of baptism being a sacrament cannot be traced in the Bible. The Bible claims to be the only religious authority for Christians so it is un-Christian to teach that it is a sacrament.

CONCLUSION

Baptism should be discouraged. It is not in the Bible and says many things to us that aren't nice such as that the unbaptised are inferior to the baptised. Logic cannot defend the view that baptism saves the soul but it contradicts it.