

Baptism

Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Matthew 28:19, ”Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:”

A fundamental doctrine of the Reformation is *sola scripture*, scripture alone. The Protestant faith is based upon this doctrine that scripture alone is the authority of the church. So, with this in mind it is essential to look at what scripture actually says and not what has come into the church through tradition.

The word baptism means to immerse, and it can refer to suffering or persecution (Mark 10:38-39); the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13); being endured with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8); water baptism (Acts 2:38); or teaching (Matthew 28:19).

In regard to the two verses, Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19, both of these scriptures have been associated with water baptism since very soon after the apostolic era. The Didache (possibly 2nd century), for instance, gives details of how to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But these verses make no mention of water, they only mention baptism. Therefore, our understanding of these verses must be derived from the rest of scripture.

Now I am not writing to confront those who hold to a priestly and hierarchical form of Christianity. I am sure that they will maintain that Acts 2:38 associates water baptism with the forgiveness of sins and is therefore necessary for salvation, and 1 Peter 3:21-22 shows that baptism and salvation are synonymous. But I am writing to those who hold to the doctrines of *sola fide*, faith alone, and *sola scripture*, scripture alone.

Before we can derive any conclusions regarding Mark 16:16, we must ask the question; “What baptism is associated with salvation?” and in regard to Matthew 28:19 we must ask, “Did the Apostles associate water baptism with the name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Spirit?” and if they did not then what baptism is this referring to?

What baptism is associated with salvation?”

Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Did the apostles associate water baptism with salvation?

Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The two responses that Peter preached were repentance and baptism. Obviously, this baptism is referring to water baptism because it is something the believer had to do. There were many Mikvaot around the temple area where the Israelites washed before entering the temple, and the 3000 who repented could be baptised in these Mikvaot.

A very large Mikvah has been excavated in the Ophel area of Old Jerusalem by the Southern Wall of the city, probably many of these were baptised there.

This was not done secretly but a large multitude would have seen these people acknowledging their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They were identifying themselves with Peter's message of salvation in Jesus Christ; they were identifying themselves with the apostles as one with them and uniting themselves with other believers; they were declaring that from now on they were the disciples of Jesus the Messiah.

It was normal to wash in the Mikvah for purification, this was a symbolic act but it was also, or should have been, an affirmation of faith in the coming Messiah, because the Mikvah could only cleanse the outward body, it could not cleanse the heart. Similarly, by being baptised in the Mikvah, they were now confessing faith in Jesus who is the Messiah and who is able to cleanse from sin through His death and resurrection.

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise following true repentance and faith in Christ. Baptism in water is required because it is a public declaration of discipleship.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of *ex opere operato* (*by the work worked*), meaning the grace the sacrament signifies is received through the sacrament, is fundamental to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church where salvation is said to be gained and maintained through the sacraments. This doctrine was firmly endorsed at the Council of Trent (Session VII, 1547) in opposition to the teachings of the Reformation which were based upon the teaching of scripture alone.

The Lutheran Church does not accept the doctrine of *ex opere operato*, but holds to *opus operantis* where grace received is dependent upon the faith of the believer. Articles 9 and 10 of the Augsburg Confession (1530) associate baptism with regeneration and upholds the doctrine of the real presence in regard to the Lord's Supper, and it rejects all who do not agree. The believer in the Lutheran Church is saved by baptism and literally feeds on Christ's body and blood at the Lord's Supper. It is difficult to understand the reasoning of the real presence being under the bread, over the bread, and in the bread at the time it is administered, but sacramental union is regarded as a mystery that is an essential doctrine in the Lutheran Church.

In most churches outside of the established church, baptism and communion are not sacraments through which grace is received, they are Christian ordinances which are kept in obedience to the scriptures. Baptism is a declaration of our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, it testifies to our union with Christ and His church, and separates us from the world. The Lord's Supper reminds us of the death and resurrection of Jesus till He comes again and is an affirmation of our covenant relationship with other believers.

(Communion in most evangelical churches is both a remembrance of the finished work of Christ and a declaration of covenant relationship with Christ and His church).

Is water baptism the baptism that Mark 16:16 is referring to?

It was not a new message to call people to repentance and baptism. John the Baptist and his disciples had been preaching repentance and baptism. Jesus also preached repentance and his disciples baptised those who believed. (John 3:22-23).

John's baptism was primarily a baptism of repentance (preparing the way for the Messiah).

The disciples of Jesus baptised those who put their trust in Jesus prior to the death and resurrection of Christ, (becoming followers of Jesus)

The apostles baptised those who repented and believed in the finished work of Jesus (the receiving of the Holy Spirit)

Water baptism identified the person with the message. It did not produce a changed life.

The work of salvation is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer through faith in the finished work of Jesus.

Is infant baptism scriptural? No, In the Old Testament baby boys were circumcised after 8 days, but baptism is not circumcision. Baptism in water is always associated with acceptance of a message.

Baptism is associated with purification not circumcision.

The only baptism associated with salvation is the baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, not water baptism. 1 Corinthians 12:13a, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body".

This is the born-again experience (John 3:3).

This is the baptism that Paul refers to in Ephesians 4:5, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism".

In 1 Peter 3:21-22 Baptism is seen to be the fulfilment or antitype of Noah's ark. Noah and his family were saved as they were in the ark. The ark is the type; baptism is the antitype. The ark typifies Christ; the baptism that fulfils this type is not water baptism, it is the baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Those who are in Christ are saved just as those who were in the Ark were saved from the flood.

2. Did the Apostles associate water baptism with the name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 28:19, "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"

Once again there is no mention of water baptism. The context is to teach all nations.

Is the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit associated with water baptism anywhere in the New Testament? No it is not, in the Acts of the Apostles baptism is always in the name of the Lord or in the name of Jesus. (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 9:18 (no name); 10:48; 16:33 (no name); Acts 19:5).

Therefore, it is not inconceivable that this scripture refers to another kind of baptism, teaching.

Is the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit associated with New Testament teaching? Yes everywhere. Consider Romans 1:1-4, "servant of Jesus Christ", "gospel of God", "spirit of holiness". 2 Corinthians 13:14, "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ", "love of God", and "communion of the Holy Spirit". Hebrews 9:14, "blood of Christ", eternal Spirit", "living God".

Romans 8 is a chapter filled with references to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Many epistles of Paul mention "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ".

There is no mention of water baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but the New Testament is filled with teaching on the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When Jesus told His disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He was not just telling His disciples what to teach, but He was also sending them out to teach fully the doctrine that He had revealed to them.

The question may arise, "If the doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is so important then why was this doctrine not taught in the Old Testament?" The answer to this question is that it is taught in the Old Testament, but until Jesus came no one could understand it. Psalm 2, Psalm 110.

3. Believers baptism.

Acts 8:35b-36a, “See, here is water; what does hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

Philip did not answer, “if you want to be saved”. He said, “If you believe with all your heart”.

The Ethiopian eunuch heard the gospel, and he believed with all his heart.

It was his response to the gospel message that Jesus is the Messiah revealed in Isaiah 53:7-8.

This is believers’ baptism; affirming faith in Christ; identification with Christ in His death and resurrection; identification with the disciples of Christ; and declaring to be a disciple of Christ.

Example: Cornelius and his family and friends received the Holy Spirit prior to being baptised, they were then commanded by Peter to be baptised.

Acts 10:47-48a, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

Cornelius and those with him were commanded to be baptized in water because Peter saw they had received the Holy Spirit.

The command to be baptised was not because they needed to be saved. Baptism was essential as an affirmation of their faith and identification with the body of Christ.

Conclusion

Is baptism in water necessary for salvation? No. The baptism that is necessary for salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit alone.

Is baptism in water a requirement for all who truly believe the gospel? Yes, it is. Baptism in water is an affirmation of faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, it is identification with the body of Christ, and recognition of being a disciple of Christ. It is for believers.

Is baptismal regeneration scriptural? No, it is not. The evidence of salvation is new life in Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit. Water baptism is a confession of faith and identification with Christ.