



The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Proverbs 18:15

## Do I have to be baptized to be saved?

**General question:** What does it mean to be saved?

**Also asked as:**

- Do I have to be baptized to get into Heaven?
- How much water is necessary?
- Is infant baptism right?
- Should I be re-baptized with more water?
- Should I be re-baptized after believing in Jesus?

**Similar questions answered separately:**

- What does *believing in Jesus* mean?
- Isn't just believing too easy?
- How can I believe with so many doubts?
- Isn't believing just psychological?
- Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?

**A caution:**

The church has differing views on baptism ... Protestant versus Catholic ... and one form of Protestantism versus another. The defining document on baptism is the Bible rather than some doctrinal statement or paper from one form of Christianity.

**The short answer:**

There is only one thing required for any person to be saved. That one thing is belief in Jesus. No good work, not even the obedient act of baptism, is required for salvation. *“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,”* Ephesians 2:8-9. Baptism is important ... but it is not required for entry into Heaven. Baptism is an outward demonstration of our identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a demonstration of conversion. A simple, literal interpretation of the Bible leads to baptism by immersion after belief in Jesus.

## The longer answer:

### The purpose of baptism

**Is baptism required for salvation?** A questionable verse used by some to try to prove that baptism is required for salvation is Mark 16:16, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." In that verse, condemnation is conditioned only on *not believing* and not on *not being baptized*. It does not state that if you believe and are not baptized you will be condemned. The Greek allows for the following punctuation, "He who has believed (and has been baptized) shall be saved". That takes baptism out of requirement-status for salvation ... relegating it to a consequential after-the-fact act of obedience. That makes the verse consistent with the numerous New Testament verses that teach that salvation is based solely on belief in Jesus. Additionally, verse 16 is problematic because the end of Mark 16, verses 9-20, known as *the longer ending of Mark* is highly disputed. That longer ending is footnoted in most modern translations as very likely not part of the original Gospel of Mark. That section of Mark contains disputed teachings (handling snakes and drinking poison), is structurally an apparent addition to the original, and in its possible requirement of baptism for salvation stands in contradiction to the many verses such as Ephesians 2:8-9 that declare salvation to be based solely on belief.

**Does baptism erase the guilt of original sin?** Although this is in the traditions of some churches, no verse in the Bible supports this belief. This belief is often part of the justification of infant baptism.

**Is baptism required for admittance into a church sanctuary?** Although this practice is in the traditions of some churches, no verse in the Bible supports this belief. In some churches, infants and new converts are baptized in the narthex (outer vestibule) before they are allowed into the church sanctuary. For centuries, the early church had no buildings and therefore had no sanctuaries.

**Is baptism symbolic?** Yes, as identification with His death, burial, and resurrection, Romans 6:3-7. This is consistent with the history of the early church where water baptism was the symbolic act of expressing one's belief in Jesus.

**Does baptism require an audience?** An audience is not specifically required in any New Testament passage on baptism ... but it has been a normal practice combining both the personal act and a corporate testimony.

**Is baptism done only by the clergy?** This is the case in many churches. However, the Great Commission to make disciples, baptize, and teach (Matthew 28:18-20) makes no distinction in clergy/laity responsibility. Clergy and laity alike may baptize.

**Should you be baptized?** Yes! Being baptized is consistent with the teaching and example of the New Testament. Jesus was baptized. If it was good enough for Him, it is good enough for us.

## The timing of baptism

**Is infant baptism right and sufficient?** Some churches believe that infant baptism is right, required because of original sin, and sufficient. That broad position is supported by tradition but not by Scripture. Some other churches do infant baptisms believing that it is right and sufficient ... and that it dedicates the child while committing the parents and congregation to raise that child under a Godly influence. Those people supporting infant baptism often use the family baptism in Acts 16:33 as an example (although the presence of young children is not stated in the passage). Some who have been baptized as children do not feel a commitment to be re-baptized after salvation ... although many do.

**Should baptism be only after salvation?** That has been, and is, a common understanding of baptism in much of the historical church. That belief is consistent with the teaching and examples of all the verses that contain some form of the root word for baptism (~ 70 uses in the New Testament) ... and is not the product of church tradition.

**Should someone be re-baptized after salvation?** This is an important personal decision for each believer who has been baptized as a child. Each such believer needs to make this decision based on the New Testament rather than on tradition, comfort, or embarrassment. The church in some places makes this difficult ... excommunicating anyone who is re-baptized. Many believers want baptism to be personally volitional and meaningful. Some in the book of Acts, previously baptized by John to repentance, were re-baptized after their belief in Jesus (Acts 19:3-5). Would you rather stand before God in judgment one day having been baptized once too many times or once too few times?

**Should someone be re-baptized for any other reason?** Should someone be re-baptized if the original baptism was performed by someone who was not actually a Christian or in a church or group calling itself Christian that actually was not? Baptism is one's act of identification with Christ because he or she became a true Christian. The ritual of baptism in and of itself has no value when devoid of the true meaning of the Gospel. Re-baptism in a truly Christian context is appropriate in such cases.

## The style of baptism

**What forms of baptism are appropriate and efficacious?** In other words, how much water is required? The word for baptism means a washing, immersion, or even the sinking of a vessel. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist ... and in Matthew 3:16 it is stated that Jesus came up out of the river afterwards ... certainly implying immersion. The examples in the New Testament certainly imply baptism by immersion ..., which is consistent with the symbolism of dying, being buried, and rising again. Those believing that baptism by sprinkling or pouring reference the Philippian jailer's family baptism being unlikely by immersion because of the time of night. They also site the unwieldiness of all of the 3,000 at Pentecost, Acts 2:41, being baptized by immersion. If the amount of water makes a difference, would you rather stand before God someday having used too much water or too little water?

**What are household baptisms?** Four passages in the New Testament record the accounts of households (families and servants) that believed in Jesus and were baptized. Those people and churches that believe in infant baptism use these passages as examples that probably included infants and young children. However, no infants are mentioned in these passages. The account of Lydia in Acts 16:13-15 mentions no infants. Another example is that of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:19-34. Again, no infants are mentioned. Verse 33 states that he and his household were baptized. However, verse 34 states that his whole household had believed in Jesus ... ruling out the presence of infants who would have been incapable of believing. Crispus in Acts 18:8 is another example. That verse clearly states that his entire household believed ... with other Corinthians who believed and were baptized. No infants are mentioned. All who were baptized had believed (again ruling out infants). Another verse, 1 Corinthians 1:16, records the baptism of the household of Stephanas. No infants are mentioned. And 1 Corinthians 16:15-18 states that the members of his household were the first fruits (first to come to faith in Christ) in Achaia *and* that they devoted themselves for ministry to other believers. Infants cannot believe and cannot devote themselves to ministry. Moreover, if one believes that *household* is a general term to describe most but not all in Stephanas' group of family and servants, then one cannot use that term to include all in the group including infants. These four passages cannot be used to conclusively include infants in those household baptisms or in the church today. The Bible is silent on infant baptism. However, the Bible is not silent in its teaching and examples of adults believing in Jesus and then being baptized.

### **Should you be baptized ... and how?**

**What is your source of authority?** Your decision on baptism is rooted in what you take as your basis of authority. If your personal choice is your basis of authority, then you are ignoring the Bible ... and defining a religion that changes at your decision and may vary from person to person. If your church experience or your church's tradition is your basis of authority, then you are putting those above the Bible ... and letting other men and women define your religion. Church beliefs and practices change and vary greatly from church to church. If you take the Bible as your authority, and understand it on a what-it-says-it-says basis, then you are letting God's revealed and unchanging Word define your religion. Which basis of authority is most trustworthy and unchangeable?

**What should you do?** The first and most important thing is to believe in Jesus as your personal savior. Baptism will not save you ... belief in Jesus is what allows Him to save you. To be sure you are saved for eternity, visit [www.911GOD.org](http://www.911GOD.org). Then, be baptized. Any believer in Jesus can baptize you. Use as much water as is available. Be re-baptized if you have any doubt about your infant or other pre-salvation baptism. Water baptism is your formal and symbolic identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is your post-belief act of obedience.

## Other verses:

**By grace through faith.** Water baptism is important. Every believer should be water baptized. However, we must not add the good work of water baptism to a salvation that is *"by grace ... 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,"* Ephesians 2:8-9. The only obedience required for salvation is that we obey in believing in Jesus. Some people asked Jesus, *"What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"* Jesus answered, *'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent,'* John 6:28-29. The simple Gospel is, *"That whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life,"* John 3:16.

**A clear understanding.** Some people interpret a few verses in the Bible as requiring water baptism for salvation. Those verses will be explained below. However, our approach to the Bible needs to be considered first. Our conclusions about any doctrine must be consistent with *all* relevant passages. Our understanding of a few verses cannot be correct if that understanding contradicts the majority of passages on the subject. It must be assumed that the New Testament authors, and the speakers they quoted, did not make errors in fact or errors of omission in all of those salvation-by-faith-only verses. We can trust God that He has made the requirements for something as important as salvation clear and non-confusing in His Word.

**Did they forget to include baptism?** There are many statements by Jesus and New Testament authors about belief being the only requirement for salvation ... including 98 uses of the word *"believe"* in the Gospel of John such as 1:12, 3:16, 3:18, 3:36, 4:41-42, 5:24, 6:40, 7:38-39, 10:25-26, and 20:31. Jesus said, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent,"* John 6:29. Peter described the requirement for salvation as, *"Every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins,"* Acts 10:43. The Philippian jailer asked, *"What must I do to be saved?"* Paul answered, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved,"* Acts 16:30-31.

Many such passages throughout the New Testament make no mention of water baptism as a requirement for salvation. Do these represent oversights or errors of omission? No! Did they forget to mention water baptism? No! Jesus, Peter, Paul, and the others did not intentionally or unintentionally leave out anything required for salvation. Those who heard them speak, and those who read their words, were not given an incomplete Gospel. The overwhelming majority of salvation passages in the New Testament make no mention of water baptism at all. We must understand those few verses that do mention baptism in a way that does not contradict the clear understanding of the overall teaching of Jesus, the Apostles, and the New Testament authors. Several New Testament books never mention water baptism, including 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. Jesus, the Apostles, and New Testament authors did not forget to include water baptism in the Gospel message. It simply does not belong there.

**Four misused verses.** How can we understand the few verses that seem to imply the requirement of water baptism? We must interpret them individually in a way that does not

contradict the over one hundred verses that define *faith in Jesus* as the only requirement for salvation. There are only four other such passages that need explanation ... as follows:

**John 3:5.** *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* Jesus had told Nicodemus about his need to be born again, *"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,"* John 3:3. Nicodemus, thinking that Jesus was referring to physical birth, responded, *"How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"* Jesus answered, *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* Was Jesus referring to water baptism or to the water of physical birth when He used the words, *"born of water"*? The answer is in the continuing words of Jesus in John 3:6, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* Jesus was referring to physical birth (born of flesh) rather than water baptism when He used the phrase, *"born of water"*. Jesus explained that a second physical birth was not what born-again meant. Being born-again is a spiritual rebirth added to one's physical birth.

**Acts 2:38.** Peter said, *"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."* Understanding this passage hinges on the meaning of the underlined word *"for"*. If this verse means that water baptism is *for* (to accomplish or produce) forgiveness, then we have no explanation of a salvation *"not of works"*, Ephesians 2:8-9. However, if the word *"for"* in that verse means *"because of"* as in *"be baptized because of the forgiveness of your sins"*, it is consistent with the numerous belief-only passages. Such a translation of the Greek as *"because of"* is an accurate and consistent option. Those who believe that one must be water baptized to be saved put an unsubstantiated emphasis on one possible translation (among many) of the preposition *"for"* in Acts 2:38. Does the word *"for"* in this verse mean *with respect to* (because of) or *resulting in* (to acquire). The Greek word translated in Acts 2:38 as *"for"* is a primary preposition occurring many, many times in the New Testament ... and translated there in many ways. The variety of possible meanings indicates that it would be unwise to base one's theology of salvation on a guess as to which one of those possible meanings is meant. On its own, could the word *"for"* in this verse be defined as *to acquire*? Yes ... but it could equally be defined as *"because of"*. If someone brings the belief that water baptism is a *prerequisite for salvation* to that verse, he or she could conclude that this verse supports that belief. Likewise, if someone brings the belief that water baptism is *not a prerequisite for salvation* to this verse, he or she could conclude that the verse supports that belief. The varied translations of this preposition in the New Testament include *throughout, about, against, become, toward, come forward, out onto, until, before, among, so, with respect to, resulting in, in regard to, bestowed on, beyond, to the end, with reference to, until, for your benefit, to this end, and leading to*. In the King James Bible, that preposition is translated as *into* 573 times, as *to* 281 times, as *unto* 207 times, as *for* 140 times, as *in* 138 times, as *on* 58 times, as *toward* 29 times, as *against* 26 times, and in other ways 322 times. The translation of this preposition is based on context ... the context of the New Testament's teaching on *belief in Jesus* being the only prerequisite for salvation. It is unwise to

take a contradictory theological stand based on one among many possible translations of a preposition.

**Acts 22:16.** At Paul's conversion, a man named Ananias said to him, "Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." This verse does not say, be baptized to wash away your sins. The placement of the word "and" in its two occurrences in the verse is strategic. The verse states, "Get up ... and ... be baptized ... and ... wash away your sins, calling on His name." The verse's grammatical structure connects the washing away of one's sins to calling on His name as in Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The structure does not connect the washing away of one's sins to getting up or to being baptized by water.

**I Peter 3:21.** "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." The word "saves" in this verse is in the present tense ... "baptism now saves you". It now saves you as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the Resurrection. If water baptism were a prerequisite of salvation, this verse would have stated, *water baptism saved (past tense) you ... saved you from sin rather than to a good conscience*. However, it is present rather than past tense. Another explanation is that Peter was most likely writing about the ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit is our present seal, pledge, and assured guarantee of salvation (Romans 8:16, Ephesians 1:13-14 & 4:30, and I Corinthians 12:11). We were saved by grace through faith ... washed clean from the penalty of sin by the spiritual bath of regeneration (salvation) by the Spirit. Then we are kept saved by the Holy Spirit. Another explanation ties the symbolism of baptism to the example of Noah in the previous verse. Noah was saved by the ark through the floodwater ... as our ark Christ will save us through our death, burial, and resurrection (symbolized in baptismal immersion). As a more reasonable explanation, the full context of I Peter is that of persecution. Water baptism was an act of public declaration, which in the first century brought persecution. Some new Christians, choosing to be secret believers, avoided persecution by avoiding baptism ... and then their consciences troubled them. Obedient and public water baptism cleansed them of that bad conscience and gave them a clean good conscience. Only with this final explanation, does an "appeal to God for a good conscience" in I Peter 3:21 make sense.

**Conclusion.** There is no definitive statement in the New Testament that water baptism is a prerequisite for salvation. Salvation is based solely on belief in Jesus. Water baptism is an important post-salvation act of obedience ... but does not save anyone.

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