

Who Should Be Baptized?

Once again, there are two main camps within Christianity on this question. One answer is that the only people who should be baptized are those who are already believers. This group also insists that young children cannot believe in Jesus, so they are excluded from Baptism. The other answer is that since all people are in need of forgiveness, and since all people can believe in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, Baptism is intended for everyone. In fact, it's part of what we call "The Great Commission." Jesus sent His disciples out with these words, written in Matthew 28:19:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

There is nothing in these words which excludes little children. In fact, we must include little children in these words for the same reason we also include: old, balding men; red-haired, blue-eyed teenage girls; Jews, Arabs, Indians, Africans; inner city postal workers; rural farmers; etc. How do we know that Jesus intended us to include them all? Because He used the all-inclusive term "all nations."

Jesus wants us to make disciples of all nations, and He didn't leave us in doubt as to how we go about doing so. He said specifically, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then read in the book of Acts what the apostles did – they baptized: men, women, and, yes, even children, as Peter said on Pentecost:

Acts 2:38-39 (ESV): Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."



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#22 – BAPTISM, 1



Out of Zion,
the perfection
of beauty,
God shines forth.



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What is Baptism?

The word *baptism* comes directly from the Greek language in which the New Testament was written. The Greek word is *baptizo*. Literally, to baptize means *to wash*. While in more ancient Greek secular writings it was a word that would apply only to things that were externally dirty, over time it became a word that was used for ritual and religious purposes. We see both uses of the word in the New Testament. Here are a couple of examples:



Mark 7:3-4 (ESV): For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash (not baptizo) their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash (baptizo). And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing (baptizo) of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.

Matthew 3:11 (ESV): "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

In these two examples, one can see that, though there was a religious element to it, the "washing" of hands, cups, pots, and even dining couches was for the purpose of mitigating against germs. Yet, when John the Baptist baptized, as he stated, it was for something internal, that is, repentance. It is this baptism which the Lord sent John to perform, which we Christians now refer to as *the Sacrament of Holy Baptism*. It is also to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism that the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21:

**Baptism, which corresponds to this,
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.**

The Water Tower Analogy

Many people read that verse from Peter's first epistle and are confused by it, or perhaps even reject it and explain it away. Their reasoning goes something like this: Only Jesus can save me, therefore Baptism cannot save, so Peter must not have meant Baptism saves. It almost seems like a reasonable conclusion. Unfortunately, no conclusion that outright rejects a clear statement of the Bible can be reasonable.

So then, how can it be that both Jesus saves and Baptism saves? That's where the analogy of a water tower might prove helpful. In towns all around our nation are these giant tubs of water that are elevated in the air. The water in them is for all the residents of those towns. Except no one ever goes to the water tower to obtain water. There's not even a spigot at most water towers. Instead, the water comes directly to the residents of the towns right to where they are, in their homes. They simply walk over to a faucet and turn a handle, and, voila, water comes pouring down.

So also, on Calvary, Jesus obtained the forgiving water of life for all people through His death on the cross. Alas! We cannot travel to Calvary to obtain forgiveness



of sins from Jesus. Neither His cross nor His blood are still there. Instead, He brings that forgiveness to us right where we are – like the pipes that carry water to us in our homes. One of those pipes is this very Sacrament of Holy Baptism. So, when Peter writes that Baptism "now saves you," he didn't mean apart from Jesus, but because God uses Baptism to bring the forgiveness of sins Jesus' died to obtain for us to us. And....

**"where there is forgiveness of sins,
there is also life and salvation."**

- Martin Luther

Symbol or Regeneration?

Historically, there are two primary understandings of what Baptism is all about. The first understanding is that Baptism is nothing more than an external symbol of an inner change that a person has already experienced. In other words, getting baptized is just about telling others that one is now a believer in Jesus. The other understanding about Baptism is that it is a true *means of grace* (see brochure #21 – THE SACRAMENTS). In this understanding, Baptism isn't just something we do to show our faithfulness to God, but is rather something God does to connect us to Jesus.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul described Baptism in Romans 6 to see which of these two understandings agrees with God's Word...

Romans 6:3-5 (ESV) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

One preacher who held to the symbolism idea of Baptism was accustomed to telling his hearers that "Baptism does nothing for you." Yet, when one pays attention to the words above, it seems far more accurate to say, "Baptism does what nothing else on earth can do." Baptism connects us to Jesus death! Baptism buries us with Christ so that we are dead to sin. Baptism raises us to newness of life with Christ. That's some pretty amazing nothing, isn't it?

The Bible calls this amazing work of Baptism *regeneration*. That's a big word that simply means "made again" or "reborn." It is in reference to Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:5:

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born
of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the
kingdom of God."**