

Baptism – Water and Spirit

Series 1-10

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Introduction to the Series: Baptism – Water and Spirit

Few doctrines in Christianity have generated more confusion, division, and distortion than baptism. For some, it's a sacred tradition rooted in infancy. For others, it's the final step in salvation. And for many, it's just a ritual they never fully understood.

But what does the Bible actually say?

This series, **Baptism: Water and Spirit**, cuts through the fog with the precision of Scripture and the clarity of rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Our aim is not to defend denominational tradition but to proclaim **biblical truth**. And that truth is this:

There is a baptism that saves—but it isn't water.

The Bible makes a sharp distinction between **spiritual baptism**—performed by the Holy Spirit the moment a person believes the gospel—and **water baptism**, which follows as an act of obedience and testimony. One is the **operation of God** (Col. 2:12); the other is a **picture** of that operation.

In this 10-part series, we'll uncover:

- What baptism is—and what it isn't
- Why spiritual baptism is central to salvation
- How water baptism pictures the gospel, but doesn't produce it
- Why immersion—not sprinkling—is the biblical mode
- How false gospels have blurred the line between symbol and substance

From the thief on the cross to Cornelius the centurion, from Romans 6 to Colossians 2, this series will lay a foundation for understanding baptism as God intended: not as a step for salvation, but as a **statement of salvation**.

If you've ever wondered, "Do I need to be baptized to be saved?"—this series is for you.

If you've trusted in water instead of Christ—this series is a rescue rope.

And if you've been saved by grace through faith—you'll walk away praising God even more for what He's already done through the **baptism made without hands**.

Welcome to **Baptism: Water and Spirit**.

It's time to get the order—and the meaning—right.

1 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – What Baptism Is—and Isn't

Introduction: A Flood of Confusion

Baptism. Few words in the Christian world carry as much sacred weight—and as much theological confusion. Some say baptism saves. Others say it simply symbolizes. Some sprinkle. Some immerse. Some baptize babies. Others insist on only believers. It's not just a doctrine—it's a **dividing line**.

But beyond church traditions and denominational preferences, we must ask:

What does the Bible actually teach about baptism?

In this first part of the *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we'll lay the foundation:

- What baptism **is**
- What baptism **isn't**
- And why understanding the distinction is **critical to the gospel**.

Baptism is **commanded**, but it is not **saving**.

It is a **symbol**, but it is not **powerless**.

It follows **faith**, but it must never be mistaken **for faith**.

So let's open our Bibles—not our traditions—and discover what baptism truly means.

1. Baptism Is Not the Means of Salvation

Let's start with what baptism **is not**. It is not the moment you are saved. It is not the act that cleanses your soul. It is not the key that unlocks heaven.

Salvation comes by **grace through faith alone**—without works, rituals, or human effort.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

— *Ephesians 2:8–9*

If baptism were required to be saved, it would be a **work added to grace**, making salvation no longer a gift but a religious transaction.

Paul warns against this kind of thinking in Galatians:

“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”

— *Galatians 3:3*

Water can wash dirt—but only the **blood of Jesus** washes sin.

2. Acts 8:36–37 – Belief Before Baptism

One of the clearest passages in the Bible to refute baptismal regeneration is found in Acts 8.

Philip is preaching Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. As they pass water, the eunuch asks:

“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”

— *Acts 8:36*

Now look closely at Philip’s answer:

“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”

— *Acts 8:37*

And the eunuch replied:

“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

— *Acts 8:37*

Only then was he baptized.

This verse (which is **missing** in many modern Bible versions) teaches the **sequence** God honors:

Belief → Baptism, not the other way around.

You don’t get baptized to believe—you get baptized **because** you already do.

3. Baptism Is a Symbol, Not the Substance

Romans 6 gives us insight into what baptism actually represents:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead... even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

— *Romans 6:3–4*

Paul is using water baptism to **symbolize** a deeper **spiritual reality** that has already taken place.

It is a **public picture** of a **private miracle**—your old man is crucified with Christ, and you now live unto God.

What baptism symbolizes:

- **Death** – Going under the water represents death to the old life.
- **Burial** – Immersion signifies complete burial of the flesh.
- **Resurrection** – Rising from the water pictures new life in Christ.

None of this **happens** in the water. It **happened** the moment you believed (Ephesians 1:13). Baptism simply **proclaims** it.

4. Why Jesus Was Baptized (And What That Teaches Us)

Some argue, “If Jesus was baptized, and He was perfect, doesn’t that mean baptism is required to be right with God?”

Let’s be clear—Jesus didn’t get baptized to be saved. He didn’t need salvation.

“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee...”

— *Matthew 3:13–14*

Jesus responded:

“Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.”

— *Matthew 3:15*

Jesus was baptized to publicly **identify with mankind**, to **launch His public ministry**, and to **affirm John's role** as forerunner.

He set an example—not for salvation—but for **obedience**.

5. The Thief on the Cross: Saved Without Baptism

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

— *Luke 23:42*

“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

— *Luke 23:43*

Here is an undeniable truth: the thief on the cross **was never baptized**, yet he was promised paradise.

This wasn't a one-time exception—it was proof that salvation is by **faith alone**.

Baptism adds nothing to what the blood of Christ has already secured.

If water were essential, Jesus would have said: “Sorry, it's too late—you can't be baptized now.”

Instead, He said, “Today... paradise.”

6. What Baptism Is: An Outward Sign of an Inward Change

Though baptism doesn't save, it's not meaningless.

It is a **declaration**, a **confession**, and a **public testimony** of your union with Christ.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized...”

— *Acts 2:41*

Baptism is for those who have **received the Word**—not babies, not the unregenerate, not the undecided.

Why baptism matters:

- It **identifies you with Christ**
- It **follows your profession of faith**

- It **publicly aligns you with the body of believers**
- It is a **step of obedience**, not a source of salvation

You don't wear a wedding ring to get married—you wear it because you already are. In the same way, baptism is the **ring** of the believer's relationship with Christ.

7. Why Infant Baptism Is Not Biblical

Infant baptism is one of the great theological errors of church history. It confuses **dedication with regeneration**.

Nowhere in Scripture do we find a single example of a baby being baptized. Baptism in the Bible always follows **repentance and belief**.

“Repent, and be baptized...”

— Acts 2:38

An infant cannot repent. An infant cannot believe. An infant cannot understand sin, grace, or the gospel.

Sprinkling water on a baby may be a **beautiful tradition**, but it is **not biblical baptism**. It neither saves nor substitutes for personal faith.

8. Baptism and Church Membership

In many churches, water baptism is tied to formal membership. While this can serve as a public affirmation of one's profession, it must never become a **requirement for salvation** or a **substitute for regeneration**.

True spiritual membership is not in a building—but in the **body of Christ**.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...”

— 1 Corinthians 12:13

This verse does **not** refer to water—but to the **spiritual baptism** done by the Holy Spirit at conversion.

The moment you're saved, you're baptized—**not into a tank**, but into a **living temple**.

9. Why Some Use Baptism to Control People

Sadly, many religious groups use baptism as a **lever of control**:

- “You must be baptized in our church, or it doesn’t count.”
- “You weren’t baptized by the right person, so it’s invalid.”
- “You must be rebaptized every time you sin.”

This is not the gospel—it’s **religious bondage**.

Baptism is a beautiful **obedience**, not a theological **threat**.

It is a celebration, not a weapon.

10. So, Should You Get Baptized?

If you’ve believed on Jesus Christ as Savior—**absolutely**.

Not because it will save you—but because it **pleases God, testifies to others, and confirms your obedience**.

If you were baptized as a baby, before belief—then yes, you should be **baptized scripturally**, as a believer by immersion.

Conclusion: A Clear Line in the Water

Baptism is not the cause of your salvation—it is the **confession** of it.

You were saved by the blood.

You are sealed by the Spirit.

And you testify to it through baptism.

Don’t trust the water. Trust the cross.

Don’t confuse the symbol for the Savior.

And don’t let tradition drown out truth.

Because when we rightly divide the Word of truth, we discover that **baptism is not the beginning of your journey with Christ—it’s the bold first step forward as a new creature in Him**.

2 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Baptized into the Body—Not the Baptistry

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...” – 1 Corinthians 12:13

Introduction: Clearing the Waters

If there is one truth that separates spiritual maturity from religious tradition, it is the understanding that the **true baptism that saves is not performed by human hands** and does not involve water. In a world filled with religious rites, denominational confusion, and ceremonial bondage, the Bible draws a clear line: the only baptism that places a person **into Christ** is the **baptism of the Holy Ghost**—a spiritual operation performed by God at the moment of salvation.

This is not to demean water baptism; it has its place—as a **testimony**, not a **transaction**. But when we rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), we see a glorious distinction between **ritual and reality**, between the **baptistry** and the **body of Christ**.

Today, we explore this truth—not merely to debate doctrinal technicalities, but to **exalt the gospel of grace** and **free the captive** from false assurances and man-made religion.

1. The Verse That Changes Everything – 1 Corinthians 12:13

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

– *1 Corinthians 12:13*

This verse is not symbolic. It is **doctrinal**. It speaks of the **spiritual baptism** that occurs at the moment of salvation—when the Holy Spirit **places the believer into the body of Christ**. It is not something the believer seeks later. It is not something that manifests in emotion or outward display. It is a supernatural, **invisible operation** that joins the redeemed to the risen Lord.

This is the **only baptism that saves**.

Note the subjects of the baptism in this verse:

- **“By one Spirit”** – The agent is the Holy Spirit, not a pastor.
- **“Are we all baptized”** – All believers, without exception, undergo this baptism.
- **“Into one body”** – The result is membership in the body of Christ, the Church.

This is not a watery bath—it is a spiritual birth.

2. What Is the “Body” We Are Baptized Into?

The “body” referred to is the **Body of Christ**—a spiritual organism made up of every true believer in the Church Age. Ephesians 1:22–23 defines it:

“...the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

You are not baptized into a local denomination.

You are not baptized into a creed, culture, or catechism.

You are baptized into **Christ Himself**.

And it is **not water** that performs this union—it is the **Spirit of God**.

3. Colossians 2:12 – The “Operation of God”

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God...”

– *Colossians 2:12*

This verse reinforces that baptism, in its saving form, is not **performed by man**, but is the **operation of God**. It is something **God does to the believer**, not something the believer does for God.

Much like circumcision under the Old Covenant, baptism is an **inward** spiritual reality. Water can only reach the body. But God’s Spirit pierces the soul and places the believer into a new position: **in Christ**.

4. Romans 6:3–4 – Buried Into Christ, Not the Tank

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”

Romans 6 is often misused to support water baptism as essential for salvation. But context reveals this to be a **positional truth**—a reality that happens the moment we are saved. The passage speaks of being “baptized into Jesus Christ,” not into water. We are **buried with Him** spiritually, not physically.

The **death, burial, and resurrection** that Romans 6 speaks of is a spiritual transformation that occurs by faith, not by a physical act.

Water baptism may **picture** it, but it cannot **produce** it.

5. Ephesians 4:5 – “One Baptism” in the Church Age

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism...”

– *Ephesians 4:5*

There are many baptisms mentioned in the Bible:

- John’s baptism of repentance
- Christ’s baptism into death
- Water baptism
- Baptism of fire
- Baptism of the Holy Ghost

But in the Church Age, Paul says there is **only one** that matters: the **baptism that places a believer into Christ**. That is not water.

If Ephesians 4:5 is true (and it is), and there is only one baptism that unites believers, **it cannot be water**. It must be the baptism **by the Spirit**.

6. Acts 8:36–37 – Belief Before Baptism

“What doth hinder me to be baptized?”

“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”

The Ethiopian eunuch had just heard the gospel from Philip. He believed and wanted to be baptized. But Philip didn’t say, “Step into the water and you’ll be saved.” He said, “**If thou believest...**”

Faith came first. Then, as a **public testimony**, baptism followed.

This passage is crucial because **verse 37 is removed or footnoted in most modern translations**, thereby blurring the vital order of **faith before baptism**. The KJV preserves the doctrinal order—salvation by faith, then baptism as testimony.

7. Galatians 3:27 – “Put on Christ” by Faith

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Again, this is not water. Paul is talking about **positional union with Christ**. At salvation, you “put on” Christ as your righteousness, identity, and covering.

The robe of righteousness doesn’t come from a pool—it comes from the cross. Water does not clothe the soul—only Christ does.

8. The Misuse of Water Baptism as a Saving Ordinance

Many denominations have exalted water baptism to an **instrument of salvation**—something required to complete or activate faith.

But that contradicts:

- **Ephesians 2:8–9** – Salvation is by grace through faith, not of works.
- **Titus 3:5** – Not by works of righteousness (including baptism).
- **1 Corinthians 1:17** – “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, downplayed his role in baptizing because the **gospel and spiritual baptism were the priorities**. If water was required for salvation, this would be a strange confession.

9. The Danger of Confusing Symbols with Substance

Water baptism is a beautiful **symbol**—but that’s all it is.

Like a wedding ring, it reflects a **commitment already made**. It’s not the act that makes you married to Christ—it’s the **vow of faith**.

Many people have been baptized with water who were never baptized by the Spirit. And many who have never touched a baptismal pool are saved by the **power of faith alone**.

10. The Moment of Spiritual Baptism – At Salvation

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.”

– *Ephesians 1:13*

The order is clear:

- You **hear** the gospel.
- You **believe** the gospel.
- You are **sealed by the Holy Spirit**.

That sealing includes the spiritual baptism into the body of Christ. It's not something you work for, feel, or earn. It's something God performs the moment you believe.

11. Baptism and Eternal Security

Once you've been spiritually baptized into the body of Christ, you can never be "un-baptized."

You are:

- **Placed into Christ** (Gal. 3:27)
- **Sealed unto the day of redemption** (Eph. 4:30)
- **Hidden in Christ with God** (Col. 3:3)

Water can fade, but spiritual placement is eternal.

12. Final Word: Baptistry or Body?

Let's be clear: **Water baptism is a testimony, not a transaction.**

It's a **witness**, not a **work**.

It's a **shadow**, not the **substance**.

Only the Holy Spirit can baptize a sinner into the sinless Savior. Only Christ can take a filthy soul and plunge it into His righteousness.

To confuse the baptistry with the body is to risk trusting in the wrong baptism.

Conclusion: The Gospel Is Enough

Let the waters of religion settle. The Word of God speaks clearly.

The **only baptism that matters eternally** is the baptism done **by the Spirit of God, through faith, into the body of Christ**. That's not the baptism the world sees. It's the one heaven registers.

So what must a man do to be saved?

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16:31)

And when he does, he's baptized—not into a denomination, not into water—but into **Christ Himself**.

Amen.

3 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Water Baptism as a Picture, Not the Power

Romans 6:3–5 – Water baptism is symbolic of death, burial, and resurrection, not the means of regeneration.

Introduction: Sacred Symbol, Not Saving Substance

There is a profound beauty in water baptism. It is a sacred ordinance, a public declaration, and a visual sermon of the gospel message. But like all symbols, its power lies not in itself—but in what it represents.

Unfortunately, through centuries of religious distortion and denominational tradition, water baptism has been elevated by many into something it was never meant to be: the very **means** of salvation. But when rightly divided, the Word of God shows us clearly—**water baptism is a picture of salvation, not the process of it**.

In this third installment of *Baptism: Water and Spirit*, we will focus on Romans 6:3–5, a passage often misused to teach baptismal regeneration. But when studied carefully, it reveals the **true purpose** of baptism—not as a saving act, but as a **symbolic expression** of a supernatural transformation that has already occurred.

1. Romans 6:3–5 – The Key Passage Misunderstood

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up

from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”

— *Romans 6:3–5*

At first glance, these verses seem to suggest that baptism is what unites us to Christ. And for those unfamiliar with biblical context, this has been used to argue that **regeneration happens through water**.

But this passage is not about the **act of water baptism**—it is about the **truth symbolized by it**.

Let’s break this down carefully.

2. The Word “Baptized” in Romans 6 – Spiritual, Not Ritual

Paul says we were “baptized into Jesus Christ”—not into water. This is clearly a **spiritual reality**, not a physical act.

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...”

— *1 Corinthians 12:13*

That baptism is performed by the **Holy Spirit**, not by a pastor. It is invisible, instantaneous, and irreversible. It occurs at the moment of salvation, when the believer is placed into the body of Christ.

Romans 6 is not talking about getting wet in a tank—it’s describing what happened **when you got saved**. Water baptism simply **depicts** that miracle.

3. Buried With Him – The Picture of the Grave

When a believer goes under the water, it symbolizes being **buried with Christ**. Not physically—but spiritually.

The old man—the sinful nature that was condemned under the law—has been judged and crucified **with Christ** at the cross. This is not a future hope or an aspirational mindset—it is a **positional reality**.

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him...”

— *Romans 6:6*

Water baptism doesn’t make this true. It **proclaims** that it already is.

4. Raised with Him – The Picture of Resurrection Life

Coming up out of the water symbolizes **resurrection**. Just as Christ rose from the grave, so we rise to “walk in newness of life.”

This is the very heart of the gospel:

- Death – Christ died **for** our sins.
- Burial – He was buried, confirming His death.
- Resurrection – He rose again in power and victory.

When a believer is baptized, they are **testifying** to the world that this has already happened to them—internally, spiritually, and permanently.

5. “Likeness” – The Key Word That Unlocks the Passage

Verse 5 says:

“If we have been planted together in the **likeness** of his death...”

Paul doesn’t say we were **literally** crucified, buried, and resurrected. He says we were planted in the **likeness** of it. This confirms that baptism is **symbolic**, not sacramental.

The phrase “planted together” emphasizes **union**, not ritual.

This is where many denominations miss the mark. They take a symbolic act and turn it into a saving ordinance. But Romans 6 shuts that down by reminding us that the entire process is about **representation**, not regeneration.

6. Baptism and the Gospel – What Truly Saves

Paul defines the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:

“Christ died for our sins... was buried... and rose again the third day.”

— *1 Corinthians 15:3–4*

Salvation is not about water—it’s about believing that gospel.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”

— *Romans 1:16*

Nowhere does Paul include baptism in the essentials of the gospel. In fact, he says:

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

— *1 Corinthians 1:17*

If baptism were necessary for salvation, this would be a strange statement. Paul understood: **preach the gospel, and baptism will follow**—not the other way around.

7. Water Baptism as Public Testimony

So if baptism doesn't save, why do we do it?

Because it is an act of **obedience, testimony, and identification.**

- It tells the world, “I belong to Jesus.”
- It affirms the inward transformation that has already occurred.
- It marks a line of separation from the old life.

In the early church, baptism often brought persecution. It was not a religious formality—it was a **bold, public declaration** of allegiance to Christ.

That's why Philip said to the Ethiopian eunuch:

“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”

— *Acts 8:37 (KJV)*

Faith **must precede** baptism. Otherwise, the symbol is empty.

8. Misinterpreting Romans 6 – A Common Error

Some teach that Romans 6 proves baptism saves because it connects baptism to death, burial, and resurrection. But this confuses **the picture with the reality.**

Let's illustrate:

- You have a photograph of your spouse. That photo is **meaningful**, but it's not your spouse.

- You wear a wedding ring. That ring is a **sign**, but not the marriage itself.

Likewise, water baptism is a **signpost**, not the **destination**. Confusing the two leads to **false assurance, ritualistic religion, and a gospel of works**.

9. The Thief on the Cross – No Water, Still Saved

We return to Luke 23. The thief cried out:

“Lord, remember me...”

And Jesus replied:

“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

No baptism. No ceremony. No ritual.

Just faith in the crucified Christ.

If baptism were necessary to be saved, Christ would have been lying. But He wasn't. Because salvation has **never** been about water—it has always been about **faith**.

10. 1 Peter 3:21 – “Baptism Doth Also Now Save Us” – Explained

This is another verse often misused:

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God...”

— *1 Peter 3:21*

Notice:

- It says baptism **saves** in a **figure**—symbolically.
- It clarifies that it's **not about washing flesh** (i.e., physical water).
- It is the **answer of a good conscience**—a result of salvation, not the cause.

This passage confirms again that baptism is about **testimony**, not transformation.

11. Baptism Is for the Believer—Not the Unsaved

Only those who have repented and believed the gospel are candidates for baptism.

That excludes:

- **Infants**, who cannot believe.
- **Unbelievers**, who are still in their sin.
- **The unrepentant**, who have no understanding of the gospel.

Baptism is for those who are already **alive in Christ**—not those trying to be.

12. Water Doesn't Wash Sin—The Blood Does

“Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”

— *Revelation 1:5*

No amount of water can cleanse a guilty conscience.

Only the blood of Jesus can remove sin's stain.

To trust in water is to **undermine the cross**.

To elevate baptism to the level of redemption is to commit **doctrinal idolatry**.

The true power is in the **finished work of Christ**, not the hands of a baptizer.

13. Paul's Clarity – Baptism Is Secondary

Paul's confession in 1 Corinthians 1 is often overlooked:

“I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius...”

— *1 Corinthians 1:14*

If baptism were part of the gospel, this would be a shocking statement. But Paul's focus was always on the **preaching of the cross**, not the performance of rituals.

He wasn't anti-baptism—he was anti-confusion.

And today, the confusion remains. That's why this truth must be repeated: **Baptism is a picture—not the power**.

14. The Danger of Baptismal Regeneration

Those who teach that baptism is necessary for salvation often fall into **Galatian error**—adding works to grace.

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel...”

— *Galatians 1:6*

To say:

- “Believe in Christ” – is gospel.
- “Believe and be baptized to be saved” – is **another gospel**.

If baptism is required to be saved, then **faith alone is insufficient**, and **Christ died in vain** (Gal. 2:21).

15. Water Baptism Still Matters—But for the Right Reason

Let’s be clear—baptism is **important**.

Jesus was baptized.

The early church practiced it.

Believers throughout the centuries have upheld it.

But never as a **saving ordinance**.

It’s obedience.

It’s testimony.

It’s identity.

But it is never the **means of salvation**.

Conclusion: The Water Is Clear

Romans 6:3–5 is not a command to be saved by baptism—it is a reminder that we **already have been spiritually united with Christ**, and now we live out that reality in **newness of life**.

Water baptism is a picture—of death, burial, and resurrection.

It is a **funeral and a celebration**.

It testifies, it proclaims, it identifies.

But it does **not save**.

The gospel is enough.
The blood is sufficient.
The cross is complete.

Let the water speak—but never let it take the place of the **Savior it symbolizes**.

4 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – John’s Baptism vs. Christian Baptism

Acts 19:1–6 – Distinguishing the baptism of repentance under John from post-resurrection baptism under grace

Introduction: Two Baptisms, Two Dispensations

When John the Baptist stepped into the Jordan River with camel’s hair on his back and fire in his voice, he was preparing the way for the King. His message was bold and disruptive: **“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matthew 3:2)

John baptized with water unto **repentance**, calling Israel to prepare their hearts for the arrival of the Messiah. His baptism was **prophetic and transitional**, rooted in Old Testament expectations and aimed squarely at the nation of Israel. It was not Christian baptism as we know it today, nor was it based on the full knowledge of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this fourth part of our *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we will rightly divide the differences between **John’s baptism** and **Christian baptism**—not just to correct theological errors, but to deepen our understanding of how God unfolds His plan through dispensational transitions.

1. Acts 19:1–6 – The Key Passage

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism.

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the

people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them...”

— *Acts 19:1–6*

This passage offers the clearest example in the New Testament that **not all baptisms are equal**. The disciples Paul met in Ephesus were baptized under John’s ministry—but that baptism was now **outdated**, and insufficient in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ.

2. What Was John’s Baptism?

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance...”

— *Matthew 3:11*

John’s baptism was:

- A **baptism of repentance**, not regeneration (Acts 13:24)
- Given to the **nation of Israel**, not the body of Christ
- Symbolic of **purification**, not spiritual rebirth
- Preceding the cross, not based on the finished work of it
- In anticipation of the Messiah—not yet fully revealed as crucified and risen

It was a call to the Jews to **turn from sin, confess their rebellion**, and **prepare** for their King. It looked **forward**, not backward.

John’s Audience: Israel

“And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

— *Matthew 3:6*

John’s baptism had everything to do with **Israel's national repentance**, in accordance with Old Testament prophecy (Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3). His mission was not to establish the Church, but to prepare Israel for its King.

It Had No Saving Power

John never promised the forgiveness of sins through baptism. He called people to **repent**, and then baptized them as a **public act of preparation**.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

— *John 1:29*

John pointed to **Jesus** as the Lamb—He never claimed that baptism was the cleansing agent. His ministry pointed **away from himself** and **toward Christ**.

3. What Is Christian Baptism?

In contrast, Christian baptism:

- Is performed **after** belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Is done in the **name of the Lord Jesus** (Acts 10:48)
- Is a **symbol** of union with Christ—not a step toward it
- Comes after a person has been **sealed with the Holy Spirit** (Eph. 1:13)
- Belongs to the **dispensation of grace**, not the kingdom gospel to Israel

Christian baptism is not about preparing for a coming Messiah—it is a declaration that one has already believed in the **risen, glorified Christ**.

4. Comparing the Two Baptisms

John's Baptism	Christian Baptism
Before the cross	After the cross
For Israel	For believers in the body of Christ
Repentance in preparation	Faith in finished work
No knowledge of resurrection	Full belief in death, burial, resurrection
Did not bestow the Holy Spirit	Follows Spirit baptism (1 Cor. 12:13)
A shadow of what was to come	A testimony of what has occurred

The difference is not just chronological—it's **theological and dispensational**.

5. Why Re-Baptism Was Necessary in Acts 19

Paul did not hesitate to **baptize again** the disciples who had only received John's baptism. Why?

Because they had not yet been baptized in light of:

- The gospel of grace
- The full identity of Jesus Christ as crucified, risen, and glorified
- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit

John's baptism was **no longer valid**. It was now incomplete.

So Paul clarified:

“John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance... but believe on him who comes after.”

Then, and only then, were they baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus**.

6. The Transition from Law to Grace

The Book of Acts is a transitional book. It moves:

- From Israel to the Gentiles
- From the law to grace
- From Jerusalem to Antioch
- From Peter to Paul
- From kingdom preaching to cross-centered preaching

John's baptism belonged to the **former system**. Christian baptism belongs to the **new creation** in Christ.

The disciples in Acts 19 were living in an old system that had expired—like someone trying to cash a check from a closed bank. The check might've had value once, but now the account is shut. They needed to be placed into the **new covenant** reality.

7. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...”

— *1 Corinthians 12:13*

No water here. This is a **spiritual baptism**, done at the moment of belief. It is **not felt**, not repeated, not seen—but it is **real**.

Those baptized by John **had not received** this baptism. That’s why Paul asked:

“Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2)

Their answer: “We haven’t even heard of the Holy Ghost!”

That alone tells us they were not Christians yet. And that’s why their baptism needed to be **post-conversion, not pre-cross**.

8. Why the Confusion Persists Today

Much of today’s confusion about baptism comes from failing to rightly divide:

- Mixing the gospels preached before and after the cross
- Assuming all baptisms are equal
- Using Acts (a transitional book) to build doctrinal norms
- Mistaking Jewish-focused passages for Church doctrine

John’s baptism **had a purpose**—but that purpose ended when Christ died and rose again.

We don’t go back to John for our theology. We go to **Paul**, the apostle to the Gentiles, the steward of the mystery, and the preacher of the gospel of grace (Ephesians 3:1–9).

9. The Danger of Holding to a Dead Baptism

When someone insists on being baptized “like Jesus was,” or “by John’s example,” they unknowingly attach themselves to a **dead system**.

Jesus was baptized to identify with sinners before He bore their sin.

You are baptized **because He already bore it**.

To cling to John's baptism is to **reject the finished work of Christ**, or at the very least to confuse the gospel and weaken its clarity.

10. The Timeline of Baptisms

Let's simplify the timeline:

- **John's baptism** (before the cross) – to prepare Israel for Christ
- **Christ's death, burial, resurrection** – the gospel completed
- **Pentecost** – Spirit baptism begins (Acts 2)
- **Acts 19** – John's baptism declared obsolete
- **Today** – spiritual baptism saves, water baptism testifies

Baptism has never been about washing away sin—it's always about expressing **faith**.

11. What Should a Believer Do Today?

If someone has only received a baptism rooted in tradition, ritual, or pre-faith experience (like infant baptism or symbolic repentance), they should do what the believers in Acts 19 did: **get baptized again**—properly, in the name of the Lord Jesus, as a believer.

12. John Himself Knew His Role Would End

“He must increase, but I must decrease.”

— *John 3:30*

John understood his place. He was the forerunner, not the finisher.

Even he said:

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I... he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.”

— *Matthew 3:11*

He knew his baptism was **temporary**—meant to **pave the way**, not **open the door**.

13. The Fire Baptism – A Warning, Not a Blessing

Some confuse “baptism with fire” as a positive thing. But it’s not. It’s a warning of judgment.

“...Whose fan is in his hand... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
— *Matthew 3:12*

The fire baptism is a **baptism of judgment**, not of blessing. Believers receive the Spirit; the lost receive fire.

John preached both: repentance **or** wrath. He made it clear—**the choice was urgent**.

14. Don’t Build Your Theology on a Discontinued Ministry

John’s ministry was powerful, but it ended. He was **arrested and beheaded**, not because he failed—but because his mission was complete.

To build your theology of baptism on John is like building your theology of animal sacrifice on Leviticus. It was true for a time—but that time has passed.

The cross changed everything.

15. Final Thoughts – Baptism Must Be Cross-Centered

If your baptism is not based on:

- The **death, burial, and resurrection** of Christ
- **Faith in the finished work**
- The **gospel of grace**
- And the **Spirit’s indwelling power**

...then it’s not Christian baptism. It may be emotional, traditional, or even sincere—but it’s not biblical.

Let’s be clear: baptism does not make you a Christian. It marks you as one.

Conclusion: One Era Ends, Another Begins

John’s baptism was the **closing chapter** of the Old Testament’s call to repentance. Christian baptism is the **opening testimony** of the New Testament’s message of grace.

The difference is not slight—it is **eternal**.

As Paul reminded the Ephesian disciples: John was faithful to his mission. But Christ is the fulfillment of it. And His baptism is one of **power, permanence, and position in the body of Christ**.

Get your baptism right—not to be saved, but to testify that you are.

5 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Misused Verses on Baptism—Setting the Record Straight

Tackling verses like Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, and 1 Peter 3:21 with proper context and doctrinal accuracy

Introduction: The Danger of Building Doctrine on Confusion

Few doctrines have caused more division, more theological error, and more spiritual insecurity than baptism. The confusion is not from the Bible, but from a failure to **rightly divide the Word of truth** (2 Tim. 2:15). Many believers are led to think they must be baptized to be saved, largely because of a handful of **misinterpreted verses** that—when taken out of context—seem to support baptismal regeneration.

In this fifth installment of our *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we are going to take a closer look at some of the most commonly **misused baptism verses**. We will not ignore them. We will not twist them. We will examine them carefully, line upon line, with a King James Bible and a rightly divided lens.

The goal? To expose error, establish clarity, and proclaim once again that **salvation is by grace through faith—not by water**.

1. Acts 2:38 – “Repent and be baptized...”

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

— Acts 2:38

Misinterpretation:

This verse is often used by those who claim baptism is required for salvation, pointing to the phrase “**for the remission of sins.**”

Context:

Peter is preaching to **Jews in Jerusalem** who had just crucified their Messiah (Acts 2:36). This is not the gospel as later revealed to Paul in its fullness (1 Cor. 15:1–4), but a **kingdom message to Israel** under the prophetic framework.

Key Clarification:

- The phrase “**for the remission of sins**” can grammatically mean “**because of** the remission of sins,” not “in order to obtain.”
- Compare this with Luke 5:14 – “Offer for thy cleansing...” The offering did not cleanse the leper—it was offered **because** he had already been cleansed.
- Also consider Matthew 12:41 – “They repented **at** the preaching of Jonas...” The word “at” is the same Greek word translated as “for” in Acts 2:38.

Correct Interpretation:

Peter is calling Israel to repent and be baptized **because of** the forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ. The forgiveness was **granted at belief** (Acts 10:43), and baptism followed as a sign of that repentance and faith.

2. Mark 16:16 – “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...”

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

— *Mark 16:16*

Misinterpretation:

Many teach that this verse proves belief plus baptism equals salvation.

Context:

- The first thing to note is that **this verse does not say** “He that is not baptized shall be damned.” It says, “He that **believeth not** shall be damned.”
- Damnation is connected to **unbelief**, not failure to be baptized.
- The **book of Mark** closes with a transitional commission to the apostles in a time when signs followed belief. This is not Church Age doctrine revealed to Paul.

Key Clarification:

- The verse **includes** baptism because it was expected to follow belief (as an act of obedience and identification), not because it was required to secure eternal life.
- The **absence of baptism** in the second half of the verse (regarding damnation) confirms this. If baptism were essential, it would read: “He that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned.”

Correct Interpretation:

Salvation is based on belief. Baptism is mentioned as the expected **external response**, but not as a **condition** for salvation.

3. 1 Peter 3:21 – “Baptism doth also now save us...”

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (**not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,**) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

— 1 Peter 3:21

Misinterpretation:

At first glance, this verse seems to clearly say that baptism saves us.

Context:

Peter has been discussing **Noah and the ark**, using it as a **figure** of how God saves His people **through judgment**.

Key Clarification:

- The verse literally says baptism **saves us as a figure**—not literally.
- It goes out of its way to say **not the putting away of the filth of the flesh**—i.e., **not the water**, not a bath, not the physical act.
- Instead, it is **“the answer of a good conscience toward God”**—which happens **after** salvation, not before it.

Correct Interpretation:

The baptism that “saves” is **not water**, but the **spiritual reality it represents**—a clean conscience given to the believer who has trusted Christ and been spiritually united to His death, burial, and resurrection.

4. John 3:5 – “Born of water and of the Spirit...”

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

— *John 3:5*

Misinterpretation:

Some teach that “born of water” refers to **baptism**, and thus make it a requirement for salvation.

Context:

Jesus is speaking to **Nicodemus**, a Pharisee, and using a **natural birth metaphor** to explain spiritual rebirth.

Key Clarification:

- The phrase “born of water” refers to **natural birth**—as in the amniotic fluid of the womb.
- Verse 6 confirms this: “That which is born of the **flesh is flesh**; and that which is born of the **Spirit is spirit**.”
- Jesus is saying: you must be **born physically** and then **born again spiritually** to enter the kingdom.

Correct Interpretation:

There is no water baptism here—only the contrast between physical and spiritual birth.

5. Titus 3:5 – “Washing of regeneration...”

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, **by the washing of regeneration**, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

— *Titus 3:5*

Misinterpretation:

Some claim “washing” refers to baptism and that regeneration happens in the water.

Context:

Paul is stressing that salvation is **not by works** (which would include water baptism).

Key Clarification:

- The “washing of regeneration” is a **metaphor** for the inner cleansing that happens when the Holy Spirit regenerates a believer.
- It parallels Ephesians 5:26—“washing of water by the **word**,” showing that the cleansing is **spiritual** and through truth.

Correct Interpretation:

This is not a reference to water—it’s a spiritual renewal and cleansing through the Word and the Spirit, not a physical rite.

6. Acts 22:16 – “Arise, and be baptized... wash away thy sins...”

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

— *Acts 22:16*

Misinterpretation:

Some argue this teaches that baptism washes away sins.

Context:

This is Paul recounting his conversion experience. He was already saved (see Acts 9:17–18) and had called on the name of the Lord.

Key Clarification:

- The Greek construction of the sentence allows for the reading: “Arise, be baptized; and (having already) washed away thy sins, call on the name of the Lord.”
- It’s best understood that baptism and calling on the Lord are **connected but distinct**.
- The act of calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13) is what washes the sin away—not the baptism.

Correct Interpretation:

Paul’s sins were washed away when he believed, and baptism followed as public confirmation.

7. Galatians 3:27 – “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ...”

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

— *Galatians 3:27*

Misinterpretation:

Some suggest this verse teaches that water baptism is what places us “into Christ.”

Context:

Paul is speaking of **spiritual union**, not water baptism. The context is about **faith**, not ritual (Gal. 3:26–29).

Key Clarification:

- The “baptism into Christ” is the **Spirit baptism** of 1 Corinthians 12:13.
- This is what happens **at the moment of salvation**, when the Spirit places the believer **into the body of Christ**.

Correct Interpretation:

This verse affirms **spiritual baptism**, not water baptism.

8. Matthew 28:19 – “Go... baptizing them...”

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

— *Matthew 28:19*

Misinterpretation:

Some assume this command makes baptism part of the gospel.

Context:

This is a command to baptize **disciples**, not a formula for salvation. It assumes belief and teaching **come first**.

Key Clarification:

- The commission includes **teaching** and **discipleship**, of which baptism is a **step of obedience**, not a **requirement for regeneration**.

- Acts 10:47–48 confirms this order: they received the Holy Ghost, then were baptized.

Correct Interpretation:

Baptism follows conversion as an **act of obedience**, not a means of grace.

Conclusion: Setting the Record Straight

Baptism is a precious and powerful testimony. It pictures our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. But it is **not the instrument of salvation**.

To claim otherwise is to misrepresent Scripture, confuse the gospel, and undermine the sufficiency of Christ's finished work.

The Gospel Is Clear:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

— *Acts 16:31*

Water is a witness—not a Savior.

It testifies to grace—it does not transmit it.

It symbolizes salvation—it does not secure it.

Let the record be clear:

Jesus saves. Not the baptistry.

The blood washes. Not the water.

The Spirit places. Not the pastor.

And that is the baptism that matters most.

6 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – The Thief on the Cross Wasn't Baptized

Luke 23:42–43 – Salvation is by grace through faith alone, apart from water baptism

Introduction: A Crucified Criminal and the Crushing of Religious Arguments

In the debate over baptism and salvation, few moments in Scripture deliver such a profound and irrefutable blow to works-based religion than the simple and staggering exchange between Jesus Christ and a dying thief.

He wasn't baptized.

He didn't take communion.

He never walked an aisle.

He didn't join a church.

He never quoted Scripture.

But he was **saved**.

Why? Because **he believed**.

In this sixth essay of our *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we focus on the thief on the cross—not just as a touching story of last-minute mercy, but as a **theological case study** in grace. His salvation demonstrates, once and for all, that **eternal life is received by faith alone**, and that baptism, while beautiful in purpose, is **not a requirement for redemption**.

1. The Scene: A Crucified Savior and Two Dying Criminals

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

— *Luke 23:39–43*

These five verses have destroyed more false doctrine than entire volumes of theology. Let's examine what happened.

2. What Did the Thief Believe?

The thief had no theology degree. He didn't have Romans 10 memorized. But he recognized:

- His own guilt: “*We indeed justly...*”

- Christ’s innocence: *“This man hath done nothing amiss...”*
- Christ’s kingship and future return: *“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”*

This wasn’t a generic cry for help. It was a confession of guilt and a **faith-filled appeal** to a sinless, sovereign Savior. He was, in essence, placing his eternal soul in the hands of the One hanging next to him—**believing that death wouldn’t be the end.**

That’s faith. That’s salvation. And it happened **before any water could be reached.**

3. What Did Jesus Promise?

“Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

— *Luke 23:43*

Notice what Jesus didn’t say:

- He didn’t say, “If only you had time to be baptized.”
- He didn’t say, “Let me ask the Father first.”
- He didn’t say, “It’s too late for you.”

He said **“Today”**. Immediate salvation. Not purgatory. Not soul sleep. Not probation. **Paradise.**

This verse annihilates any doctrine that claims water baptism is a condition for salvation.

4. The Thief Was Not Baptized

There is **no record** of the thief being baptized—and given the timeline and context, there was **no opportunity** for it.

He was already crucified, nailed to a cross, and hours from death. No priest or disciple could have reached him in time. No Roman would have allowed a water break for a criminal's religious observance.

Yet he received a **guaranteed promise** from Jesus Himself.

To insist that baptism is required for salvation is to suggest that Jesus **lied** or made an exception—neither of which is true.

5. “Well That Was Old Testament” – The Flawed Argument of Legalists

Some baptismal regenerationists claim that the thief on the cross was saved **before** the cross and thus **under the Old Testament**, where baptism wasn’t yet required.

Let’s refute this idea biblically and logically.

A. The New Covenant Was Sealed in Blood

“This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

— *Luke 22:20*

The New Covenant began **with Christ’s death**. The thief was saved **after Jesus had been nailed to the cross**, and during the very event that instituted the New Testament.

B. Romans 4 Says Abraham Was Saved by Faith—Just Like Us

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”

— *Romans 4:3*

Whether before or after the cross, salvation has **always been by faith**. If anything, the thief's salvation shows continuity of God’s grace—not a loophole.

C. Hebrews 9:15–17 Settles It

“For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

For a testament is of force after men are dead...”

— *Hebrews 9:16–17*

This proves Jesus' death initiated the New Covenant. The thief died **under it**, not apart from it.

6. What Does This Mean for Baptism?

It means baptism is **not** a requirement for justification.

Water baptism is:

- A **symbol** of the believer’s union with Christ

- A **public testimony** of internal transformation
- An **act of obedience**, not a condition for forgiveness

But it is **not**:

- A key to eternal life
- A sacrament that imparts grace
- A replacement for faith

7. “Faith Plus Baptism” Is Another Gospel

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel...”

— *Galatians 1:6*

When someone says, “You must believe in Jesus **and** be baptized to be saved,” they are preaching a **false gospel**.

Why?

Because they are:

- Adding works to grace
- Nullifying the cross (Gal. 2:21)
- Turning a **gift** into a **wage**

If the thief on the cross was saved by faith alone, **so are we**. Because Jesus is the same **yesterday, and to day, and for ever** (Heb. 13:8).

8. Paul’s Message Confirms the Thief’s Example

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

— *1 Corinthians 1:17*

If baptism were necessary for salvation, why would Paul downplay it?

Paul led many to Christ—but only baptized a few (1 Cor. 1:14–16). That would be spiritual malpractice if baptism were essential.

Paul’s gospel was **Christ crucified** and **faith alone**—not Christ plus a sacrament.

9. Baptism Is For the Living, Not the Dying

The thief's story also reminds us that baptism is for those who can:

- Testify publicly
- Join a local church
- Walk in obedience
- Teach others through their example

The thief had no such opportunity—but that didn't stop Jesus from saving him.

This gives hope to:

- Deathbed conversions
- Terminal patients
- Those saved in prison or war
- People in regions without access to water or churches

God is not bound by man-made rituals. He saves by **grace through faith**—full stop.

10. Let God Be True and Every Denomination a Liar

When church traditions, creeds, or rituals claim that baptism saves, they **contradict the clear word of God**. The thief's salvation is divine commentary on the sufficiency of faith alone.

It's not a loophole—it's a **lighthouse** for all who are perishing.

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

— *Romans 4:5*

That's how the thief was saved. That's how you're saved. That's how anyone is saved.

11. Answering Common Objections

“But what about Acts 2:38?”

We addressed this in Essay 5. “For the remission of sins” can mean “because of,” and in Acts 10, people received the Holy Spirit **before** they were baptized.

“What about Mark 16:16?”

It says, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” Not, “He that is not baptized.”

“Isn’t baptism the new circumcision?”

No. Circumcision was a covenant sign for Israel. Baptism is a public testimony for **those already saved**.

12. The Gospel Is Good News for the Dying

The thief’s final moments were met with eternal mercy. His story assures us that **no one is too far gone**, and that the gospel is truly **the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth** (Rom. 1:16).

He had **nothing to offer**.

No time to perform.

No strength to prove himself.

He simply looked to Jesus—and was saved.

13. Theological Implications of the Thief’s Salvation

- Baptism is not required to receive the Holy Spirit
- Salvation is immediate at the moment of belief
- Faith is sufficient, even without church rituals
- God honors sincerity, not ceremony
- Eternal life is secured through **Christ alone**, not Christ + performance

Conclusion: A Dying Man’s Faith, A Living Gospel

The thief on the cross didn't say a fancy prayer. He didn't quote John 3:16. He didn't join the church. He had no works. He had no water.

But he had **faith in Jesus Christ**.

And that was enough.

His story stands as a **theological thunderclap** that silences every false gospel and ritual-based salvation system.

If water baptism were essential, then the thief would be lost—and Jesus would be wrong.

But he wasn't lost. And Jesus wasn't wrong.

He was saved.

By grace.

Through faith.

In Christ alone.

7 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Born of Water and Spirit—What Did Jesus Mean?

John 3:5 – Interpreting “born of water” in context; refuting baptismal regeneration

Introduction: One Phrase, Endless Misinterpretations

Jesus' nighttime conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 contains one of the most quoted yet misunderstood phrases in all of Scripture:

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

— *John 3:5*

To many, this statement confirms a longstanding theological assumption: that water baptism is a required step in the process of salvation. The phrase “born of water” is taken to mean “baptized in water,” leading to doctrines that tie justification to a ritual act.

But when we examine the **context**, the **audience**, the **purpose** of Christ's words, and the **testimony of the entire New Testament**, we discover something very different. Jesus wasn't preaching baptismal regeneration—He was revealing the necessity of **spiritual rebirth** through the Holy Spirit, not through sacraments.

In this seventh essay of the *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we will explore what “born of water and of the Spirit” actually means—and why it does **not** teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation.

1. The Conversation with Nicodemus: John 3 in Context

John 3:1–7 lays the foundation:

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

The same came to Jesus by night...

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old?

...Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Let’s break this down:

- Jesus is speaking to **Nicodemus**, a Pharisee who understands ceremonial Judaism but is spiritually blind.
- Jesus introduces the concept of being “**born again**”—a term Nicodemus doesn’t understand.
- Jesus explains further using the phrase “**born of water and of the Spirit.**”

The entire conversation revolves around the **necessity of spiritual rebirth**, not religious rituals.

2. Misinterpretation: “Born of Water” = Baptism?

Some claim that “born of water” refers to **water baptism**, and that Jesus was requiring both water and Spirit baptism for entrance into the kingdom.

But this creates several theological problems:

- Jesus **never mentioned baptism** in His explanation of being born again.
- Baptism isn’t introduced in John’s gospel until **John 3:22**, well after this dialogue.
- The **context** of John 3 is about **spiritual birth**, not ceremonial cleansing.
- If baptism were required, then **faith alone** (John 3:16) would not be sufficient.

If “born of water” means baptism, then:

- The thief on the cross wasn’t saved.
- Paul contradicted Jesus in 1 Corinthians 1:17.
- John 3:16 becomes incomplete or inaccurate.

Clearly, the interpretation of “born of water” as baptism is out of alignment with both the **text and the broader testimony of Scripture**.

3. Correct Interpretation: “Born of Water” = Natural Birth

The clearest and most contextually faithful interpretation is that “born of water” refers to **physical birth**—being born naturally.

This is supported by **John 3:6**, the very next verse:

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Jesus is drawing a **contrast**, not a combination.

He is essentially saying:

- Physical birth = water/flesh birth
- Spiritual birth = regeneration by the Spirit

This matches the biological understanding of the time. In natural birth, the baby is surrounded by **amniotic fluid** (often referred to as the “water breaking” before labor). To be “born of water” is to be **physically born**—the first birth every human experiences.

Jesus is saying, “You must be born **once physically** and **again spiritually** to enter the kingdom.”

4. Supporting Context: No Mention of Baptism

There is **no mention of water baptism** in John 3.

- Jesus is explaining **the concept of being born again** to a Pharisee.
- Nicodemus is confused by the **idea of a second birth**, not a ritual.
- Jesus does not say, “Except a man be baptized...”—He says “born.”

- The word “baptize” doesn’t appear in this conversation at all.

If Jesus were teaching that baptism is required, He would have made that **explicit**—but He didn’t. The context is about **spiritual regeneration**, not ritual observance.

5. The Greek Grammar Supports Separation

In Greek, the phrase “born of water and of the Spirit” contains two distinct prepositions and articles—indicating **two separate but parallel components**.

Grammatically, this can be read as:

- “Born of [the] water” = natural birth
- “Born of [the] Spirit” = spiritual birth

These are not **two components of one spiritual act**, but **two distinct births**—one physical, one spiritual.

6. The Witness of the Rest of John 3

If baptism were necessary for salvation, we’d expect it to show up clearly later in the chapter. But instead, we read:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever **believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

— *John 3:16*

No mention of baptism. No mention of rituals. Just **belief**.

Also:

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that **believeth not** is condemned already..”

— *John 3:18*

Again—no baptism required. Just faith.

This confirms that Jesus’ point in verse 5 was not about rituals, but **regeneration**.

7. The Broader Testimony of the New Testament

Throughout the New Testament, salvation is consistently tied to **faith**, not water:

- **Ephesians 2:8–9** – “By grace are ye saved through faith... not of works.”
- **Romans 10:9** – “If thou shalt confess... and believe... thou shalt be saved.”
- **Acts 16:31** – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

None of these foundational salvation texts include baptism as a condition.

If Jesus had taught baptismal regeneration in John 3, it would contradict the entire New Testament witness.

8. Addressing Alternative Interpretations

Some argue “born of water” could mean:

A. Spiritual Cleansing

They say water is symbolic of the Word or of spiritual renewal.

Yes, Ephesians 5:26 speaks of the “washing of water by the word,” but that’s not the **natural** understanding of water in John 3. Nicodemus would not have understood “water” as Scripture cleansing. He was thinking of **birth**, and Jesus meets him in that understanding.

B. Ritual Purification

Some say Jesus was referencing Jewish ritual washings.

This misses the mark—because Nicodemus was puzzled, not because Jesus referenced ritual, but because He mentioned a **second birth**, which he couldn’t grasp biologically.

Again, the problem in Nicodemus’s mind was **birth**, not baptism or ceremony.

9. Why This Interpretation Matters

If “born of water” means **baptism**, then:

- Salvation is tied to a **work**.
- People saved by faith alone (like the thief on the cross) would be excluded.
- Millions of believers who trusted Christ but died unbaptized would be damned.

- The **simplicity of the gospel** (2 Cor. 11:3) would be destroyed.

But if “born of water” means **physical birth**, then Jesus’ message remains consistent:

“Ye must be born again.”

Not again **in water**, but again **in Spirit**.

10. Nicodemus Eventually Believed

“And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night...”

— *John 19:39*

Later, we see Nicodemus helping bury the body of Jesus—indicating that he likely **did believe** in the end. Whether or not he was baptized, we are not told—but his journey began in **John 3**, where Jesus told him **faith, not ritual**, was the key.

11. The Gospel According to John Requires Faith, Not Baptism

John’s gospel never teaches baptism as a condition of salvation.

- It uses the word “believe” **almost 100 times**.
- John 20:31 tells us the very purpose of the book:

“But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ... and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

Notice: **believing = life**. Not baptizing. Not church membership. Not sacraments.

12. Summary of Key Points

- “Born of water” in John 3:5 most naturally means **natural birth**.
- The **context** of the passage is about **spiritual rebirth**, not ceremony.
- Baptism is not even mentioned directly in John 3.
- The rest of the chapter (and Gospel) emphasizes **faith alone**.
- To insert baptism into this text is to **read into the passage**, not read **out of it**.

13. What This Means for Believers Today

This interpretation frees the believer from:

- **Ritualistic bondage**
- **False gospels** that preach Christ plus something else
- **Denominational legalism** tied to works salvation

It reaffirms that salvation is not earned through external performance—but received by **faith alone** in Christ alone.

14. A Warning Against Baptismal Regeneration

To preach that “born of water” means baptism, and that baptism is required to be saved, is to **undermine the gospel**.

“If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

— *Galatians 2:21*

Baptism is a **testimony**, not a ticket.

It is a **symbol**, not salvation.

Preaching baptismal regeneration is to add works to grace and turn the gospel into a man-made religion.

15. Closing Illustration: Two Births, One Savior

Picture this: Every person is born once—“of water,” naturally. But unless they are **born again**, they remain **spiritually dead**.

Jesus wasn’t giving Nicodemus a new ritual. He was offering him a **new birth**.

No one is born a Christian.

No one is saved by ceremony.

Everyone must be **born again**—from above, by the Spirit.

Conclusion: The Simplicity of the Gospel, Defended Again

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

— *John 3:5*

Jesus wasn't complicating the gospel. He was clarifying it.

To be born of water = **you were born**.

To be born of the Spirit = **you were born again**.

The first gets you into this world.

The second gets you into the next.

And you don't get the second through water—you get it through **faith in the crucified and risen Christ**.

Let no false teacher bind you to baptism for salvation.

Let no denomination chain grace to ceremony.

Jesus said, "Ye must be born again."

Not baptized again.

Born again.

And that happens when a sinner believes.

8 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Baptism and the New Creature in Christ

Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12 – Spiritual baptism unites us with Christ's death and resurrection.

Introduction: More Than a Ritual, A New Reality

Baptism is often discussed in terms of water, tradition, denomination, or church membership. But to rightly understand **spiritual baptism**, we must see it for what it truly is: the **divine work of God** that takes place the moment a sinner believes, whereby they are placed into Christ, and become a **new creature** (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is not an external ceremony—it is an internal creation.

The world sees baptism as water; the religious mind sees it as ritual; but Scripture reveals it as a **supernatural placement**. In this eighth essay of the *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we explore how spiritual baptism doesn't simply mark a decision—it marks a **death and resurrection**. It is not about entering the baptistry. It is about entering the **body of Christ**—forever changed.

1. Galatians 3:27 – “Put On Christ”

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

— *Galatians 3:27*

This verse is not talking about water baptism. It’s talking about **Spirit baptism**—the act of being placed **into Christ** at the moment of faith.

The Greek word for “put on” (ἐνεδύσασθε – *enedusasthe*) carries the idea of **putting on clothing**—a full identification with a new identity. When you are saved, you are **clothed with Christ**, not by water, but by the Spirit.

You no longer stand in your own righteousness—you are **wrapped in His**.

This spiritual baptism is **positional**—it tells you where you now stand. You are no longer in Adam; you are in Christ.

2. Colossians 2:12 – “Buried with Him in Baptism”

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

— *Colossians 2:12*

This is one of the clearest declarations of the **spiritual nature** of baptism. Paul explicitly says that this occurs through **faith** in the **operation of God**.

Let’s break it down:

- **Buried with Him** – Our old man is crucified and buried (Romans 6:6).
- **Risen with Him** – We share in Christ’s resurrection spiritually.
- **Through faith** – This is a transaction of belief, not ceremony.
- **The operation of God** – It is God’s work, not man’s ritual.

No water. No baptistry. Just divine power at work in the soul of a believer.

3. The New Creature: What Happens at Salvation

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

— *2 Corinthians 5:17*

The moment the Holy Spirit places you into Christ, **you are made new**. This is not symbolic or eventual—it is **instant and transformational**.

What changes?

- **Positionally:** You are moved from death to life, from Adam to Christ.
- **Legally:** You are declared righteous.
- **Spiritually:** You are made alive and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
- **Relationally:** You are adopted into God’s family.
- **Eternally:** Your name is written in the Book of Life.

Water cannot do that. Religion cannot do that. Only **God Himself** can.

4. What Spiritual Baptism Is—and Isn’t

It IS:

- A supernatural act by the Holy Spirit
- The means by which you are united to Christ
- The defining moment of your transformation
- A permanent, unrepeatable event

It IS NOT:

- A water ceremony
- A religious obligation
- An emotional experience
- A process that occurs later

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...”

— *1 Corinthians 12:13*

That’s not water—that’s power.

5. You Were Buried—Not Just Cleansed

Many view baptism merely as cleansing. But the spiritual truth is deeper: you were **buried**.

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”

— *Romans 6:3*

God didn't clean up your old self—He killed it. The spiritual baptism signifies that your old nature is **dead and buried**, and your new man is **alive in Christ**.

You are not reformed—you are **reborn**.

6. You Were Raised—Not Just Rehabilitated

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ... and hath raised us up together...”

— *Ephesians 2:5–6*

Your spiritual resurrection is not a future event—it is a present reality. You are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

This isn't poetic language. This is **positional truth**.

Spiritual baptism united you with the **risen Lord**, and your life is now **hidden in Him**.

7. “Put On Christ” = Identity Transformation

Back to Galatians 3:27. To “put on Christ” is to be **clothed with His righteousness** (Isaiah 61:10).

Just as Joseph was given royal garments, and the prodigal son was given the robe of the father, so you have been **clothed in Christ**.

You are now:

- Accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6)
- Complete in Him (Col. 2:10)
- Chosen, holy, and beloved (Col. 3:12)

Not because of a ceremony—but because of **faith** in the finished work of Christ.

8. The Operation of God – Not of Man

“Through faith of the operation of God...”

— *Colossians 2:12*

This is one of the strongest verses in the New Testament refuting baptismal regeneration.

The Greek word for “operation” is *energeia*—meaning **divine energy or supernatural working**.

This proves:

- It is not man’s work—it is **God’s**.
- It is not water—it is **Spirit**.
- It is not ritual—it is **regeneration**.

If water were required, then God’s operation would be **incomplete without man**—a heretical idea.

9. Your Baptism Is a New Beginning

Spiritual baptism is the **start of your identity in Christ**. Everything that follows—your sanctification, service, and spiritual growth—is rooted in this union.

You are:

- Joined to His death (Gal. 2:20)
- Partaker in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4–5)
- United in His life (Col. 3:4)

Your salvation isn’t based on what you do—it’s based on **where you are**: in Him.

10. This Is Why Baptism Can’t Be Lost

If spiritual baptism is what places you into Christ, then to say you can lose your salvation is to say **you can be unbaptized spiritually**—which the Bible never teaches.

Once you're placed into Christ:

- You’re sealed (Eph. 4:30)
- You’re preserved (Jude 1)

- You're kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5)

You're not just forgiven—you're **fused to Christ** forever.

11. Why Water Baptism Still Matters

Though water baptism doesn't save, it still has great value:

- It is a **public testimony** of the spiritual baptism that has already occurred.
- It identifies you with Christ's people and message.
- It's an act of obedience and celebration.

But let's be clear: **water can only show what the Spirit has already done.**

12. "New Creature" – The Fruit of Spiritual Baptism

Let's revisit 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

This verse hinges on **being "in Christ"**—which happens by Spirit baptism.

What happens?

- Your nature is changed
- Your desires shift
- Your future is secure
- Your relationship with sin is severed
- Your relationship with God is sealed

All of this flows not from water—but from the **living water of the Spirit.**

13. False Gospels Confuse the Order

Many false teachings put water before grace:

- "Be baptized and then you'll be saved."
- "You need water to complete your salvation."

- “Baptism is part of the new birth.”

But Scripture says:

- Believe → saved → spiritually baptized → testify through water

Reversing this order **confuses the gospel** and adds human performance to divine grace.

14. The Comfort of Union with Christ

Being baptized into Christ means you’re no longer alone:

- You are in His body
- You are joined to His Spirit
- You are loved as He is loved
- You are safe, secure, and sanctified

This isn’t a feeling—it’s a **fact** sealed in heaven.

15. Beware the Substitute: Ritual Without Regeneration

Many today have **water testimonies but no Spirit transformation**.

- They got wet—but they never got born again.
- They joined a church—but never joined Christ.
- They relied on ritual—but never repented.

Spiritual baptism is what saves. Water can only follow—it can never produce.

Conclusion: Baptized, Buried, and Born Again

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

— *Galatians 3:27*

“Buried with him in baptism... risen with him through the faith of the operation of God.”

— *Colossians 2:12*

This is the testimony of every true believer:

- I am **in Christ**.

- I have been **buried with Him**.
- I am **raised to new life**.
- I am a **new creature**.

Not because I entered the water—but because I entered the Savior.

9 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Immersion, Not Sprinkling—Why Mode Matters

Biblical evidence that baptism is immersion, not sprinkling, and why the form matters.

Introduction: Mode Matters More Than Most Think

In the modern church, baptism has become a flexible ritual, performed in a variety of ways depending on denomination or tradition. Some sprinkle water over the head. Some pour from a pitcher. Others immerse a believer fully beneath the surface. To many, these are simply **stylistic preferences**—aesthetic choices without doctrinal consequence.

But when we examine the Word of God closely, we find that **mode matters**. The Greek word for baptism, the practice of the early church, and the rich symbolism all point to **immersion**—not sprinkling or pouring. And the reason for this is not just historical or linguistic. It's **theological**. The mode of baptism preaches a message. It pictures death, burial, and resurrection. To change the form is to **diminish the meaning**.

In this ninth essay of the *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we defend immersion as the **only biblical mode** of water baptism—and explain why any deviation from it muddies the gospel and confuses the testimony of salvation.

1. The Meaning of the Word “Baptize”

The English word "baptize" is transliterated from the Greek word **baptizō (βαπτίζω)**, which means:

"to dip, to immerse, to submerge, to plunge beneath."

It does **not** mean:

- To sprinkle (**rhantizō**)

- To pour (**cheō** or **ekcheō**)

If the Holy Spirit had intended to communicate sprinkling or pouring, He would have inspired the use of **different Greek terms**. But every time “baptize” is used, it reflects a **full immersion**.

Even secular Greek writings of the time support this meaning. In naval documents, a ship that was “baptized” had been **completely sunk**—not merely splashed.

So from the start, the **linguistic evidence** overwhelmingly supports immersion.

2. Baptism as a Picture of Burial and Resurrection

“Therefore we are **buried with him by baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead... even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

— *Romans 6:4*

Paul connects baptism to a **burial**. This is critical.

You don’t sprinkle dirt on a corpse to bury it—you place it **fully underground**. In the same way, immersion is the only method that properly **represents death and resurrection**.

The symbolism requires immersion:

- Going **down** into the water represents **death and burial**
- Coming **up** from the water represents **resurrection and new life**

Sprinkling does not preach the gospel. **Immersion does.**

3. The Example of Jesus Christ Himself

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, **went up straightway out of the water**: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him...”

— *Matthew 3:16*

Jesus was baptized by John **in the Jordan River**. The fact that He “went up out of the water” implies that He had gone **down into it**.

If sprinkling were sufficient, there would have been no reason to enter the river at all.

John didn’t carry a jug of water to each person—people came to the river to be **immersed**.

“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, **because there was much water there...**”

— *John 3:23*

If sprinkling were the method, "**much water**" would be unnecessary. But immersion requires a **body of water large enough** to submerge a person.

4. The Ethiopian Eunuch's Baptism

“And they went **down both into the water**, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they were come **up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip...”

— *Acts 8:38–39*

This is a crystal-clear example of immersion:

- They went **into** the water
- The eunuch was baptized
- They came **out** of the water

There is no reason for both men to enter the water if Philip was only going to sprinkle. The entire description **assumes immersion**.

5. Jewish Ritual Washings – Total Immersion

Before John the Baptist, ritual cleansing was already practiced in Jewish culture. These “mikvahs” were immersion pools where Jews would **fully submerge** themselves for ceremonial cleansing.

- The concept of washing for purification was well-known.
- The Hebrew people would not have associated **sprinkling** with complete cleansing.

In fact, the Old Testament law distinguishes between **sprinkling for objects** and **washing for people**.

John's baptism was understood in the context of these full-body immersions.

6. Church History Supports Immersion

The **early church fathers** and Christian writings confirm immersion was the original mode:

- **Didache (1st century AD):** Instructed baptism by immersion in living water (running water) whenever possible.
- **Justin Martyr (2nd century AD):** Describes baptism as going into and coming out of the water.
- **Tertullian (3rd century AD):** Also affirms immersion as the method practiced.

Sprinkling did not emerge as a regular practice until **hundreds of years later**, mostly due to **convenience**, fear of illness, or political decrees.

Even **Roman Catholic scholars** admit that immersion was the practice of the early church.

7. The Mode Preaches the Message

Changing the method of baptism alters the **meaning**.

Immersion says:

- You have **died with Christ**
- You are **buried with Him**
- You are **risen to walk in newness of life**

Sprinkling says:

- You've been **lightly cleansed**
- Your head has been **touched with water**
- You've followed a **tradition**, not the gospel pattern

The **symbolic power of baptism** is in the immersion. To change it is to **mute the message**.

8. Why Sprinkling Took Hold: History of a Compromise

Sprinkling became common due to:

- Infant baptism (easier to sprinkle than immerse a baby)
- Health concerns (fear of disease or weakness)
- Ecclesiastical control (priests simplifying mass baptisms)

- Political influence (Roman Catholic decrees under Constantine)

These were **not biblical reasons**. They were **human accommodations**.

As church hierarchy increased, biblical methods were replaced with **ritualistic efficiency**.

But we must return to the **pattern of Scripture**, not the **precedent of tradition**.

9. Infant Baptism by Sprinkling: Nowhere in Scripture

Sprinkling is most often associated with infant baptism. But:

- There is **no command** in the Bible to baptize infants.
- There is **no example** in the Bible of an infant being baptized.
- Every instance of baptism involves someone who has **believed** and **repented**.

A baby cannot repent. A baby cannot believe. A baby cannot picture death, burial, or resurrection.

Therefore, **sprinkling a baby not only corrupts the mode—it corrupts the meaning**.

10. Jesus' Warning Against Vain Traditions

“Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.”

— *Matthew 15:6*

When churches choose to sprinkle instead of immerse, they elevate **tradition** above **truth**.

What began as a **convenience** became a **commandment**. But no amount of church authority can override the **Word of God**.

To abandon immersion is to abandon:

- The **apostolic pattern**
- The **gospel symbolism**
- The **obedience of faith**

11. “It’s Just a Symbol”—Why That Doesn’t Excuse Change

Some argue, “It’s just symbolic, so the method doesn’t matter.”

But would we say that about:

- The **Lord's Supper**? (“Crackers or donuts, it’s all symbolic!”)
- The **Passover**? (“Lamb or pizza—it’s the thought that counts!”)
- The **cross**? (“Why not a trapezoid? It’s just a shape!”)

No.

The **power of a symbol** lies in its **faithfulness to what it represents**. The more precise the picture, the clearer the truth.

Sprinkling distorts the symbol. Immersion preserves it.

12. Baptism and Obedience: Doing It God’s Way

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them...”

— *Matthew 28:19*

Jesus didn’t just say “baptize”—He showed **how**.

He was immersed.

His apostles immersed.

The early church immersed.

True obedience doesn’t just follow **what** God says—but **how** He says it.

13. Practical Objections Answered

“What if there’s no water available?”

Scripture shows people traveled or sought out **“much water.”** Baptism can be delayed until proper means are available. God doesn’t require what is impossible—but we should never default to a **lesser method** when the true one is possible.

“What if someone is disabled or ill?”

God understands special cases—but let’s not build doctrine on **exceptions**. In rare circumstances, alternate means may be applied with **pastoral care and spiritual discretion**. But these are **exceptions, not the norm**.

14. The Testimony of Obedience

Baptism is a public declaration of faith. It is a moment where a believer says:

- “I identify with the crucified Christ.”
- “My old self is dead and buried.”
- “I am risen to walk in new life.”

Immersion shows all of that—clearly, powerfully, biblically.

Sprinkling mumbles. Immersion **preaches**.

15. Immersion Honors the Gospel

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel... that Christ died for our sins... and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day...”

— *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*

The gospel is:

- **Death**
- **Burial**
- **Resurrection**

Immersion is the **only mode** that honors all three.

- Down into the water = death
- Under the water = burial
- Up out of the water = resurrection

It is a **living sermon** of the saving work of Christ.

Conclusion: Don't Just Get Wet—Get It Right

Baptism is more than a formality. It is a **faithful testimony** of what God has done through His Son. To change the method is to distort the message.

The early church **immersed**.

The apostles **immersed**.

Jesus **was immersed**.

Sprinkling came later—through convenience, compromise, and tradition.

Let us return to the Word. Let us return to immersion. Let us honor the symbol God ordained—not just with **water**, but with **truth**.

Because in baptism, **form isn't just function—form is faithfulness**.

10 of 10: Baptism: Water and Spirit – Obedience After Salvation—Not a Step for Salvation

Acts 10:44–48 – Cornelius was saved before baptism; water follows faith, not precedes it

Introduction: The Final Word on the Order of Salvation

The gospel is simple: **Christ died, was buried, and rose again** (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Salvation is offered by grace, through faith—not of works, not of ceremony, and not of water. Yet throughout history, well-meaning Christians and institutional churches have confused baptism with salvation, turning an act of obedience into a requirement for justification.

In this final essay of the *Baptism: Water and Spirit* series, we bring clarity to one of the most misrepresented aspects of Christian doctrine: **the timing of baptism**. Does baptism save? Does it complete salvation? Or does it follow salvation as a public declaration?

The story of Cornelius in Acts 10 provides an undeniable case study. The order is crystal clear: **Faith came first. The Holy Spirit was received. Then, and only then, came water baptism**. The truth is unmistakable—baptism is **obedience after salvation**, not a step required to achieve it.

1. The Story of Cornelius: A Gentile Seeker

Cornelius was a Roman centurion—a Gentile by birth, but a devout seeker of God. He gave alms, prayed often, and feared God. But despite his religiosity, Cornelius **was not yet saved**.

God orchestrated a divine encounter between Cornelius and Peter. Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household, and what happened next is a bombshell for baptismal regeneration theology.

2. Acts 10:44–48 – The Text That Ends the Argument

“While Peter yet spake these words, **the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word**.

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished...

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

Then answered Peter,

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

— *Acts 10:44–47*

The order is essential:

1. Peter **preaches the gospel**.
2. Cornelius and his household **believe**.
3. The Holy Spirit **falls on them**—proving they are saved.
4. Peter **orders them to be baptized** in water.

This passage destroys any doctrine that teaches **water baptism is required to be saved**.

3. The Holy Spirit Proves They Were Already Saved

Romans 8:9 says:

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before being baptized. That means he was **already saved**.

The Spirit doesn't indwell the lost. He is the **seal** of the saved (Ephesians 1:13). The moment Cornelius believed the gospel, he was sealed by the Holy Spirit—and that occurred **before** he touched a drop of water.

4. Peter Didn't Preach Baptism—He Preached Christ

Let's look back at what Peter actually said just before the Spirit fell:

“To him give all the prophets witness, that **through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.**”

— *Acts 10:43*

Peter declared salvation by **faith in Christ's name**, and immediately upon hearing this, Cornelius and his household **believed**—and the Holy Spirit came.

If baptism were essential to receive forgiveness of sins, Peter would have said so. But he didn't.

Why? Because it's not.

5. Baptism Comes After Belief—Always

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see a consistent pattern:

Event	Reference	Order
Pentecost	Acts 2:41	“They that gladly received his word were baptized.”
Ethiopian Eunuch	Acts 8:36–38	“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”
Cornelius	Acts 10:44–48	Received Spirit before baptism
Philippian Jailer	Acts 16:31–33	“Believe... and they were baptized.”
Disciples in Ephesus	Acts 19:4–5	Believed and then were baptized.

Never once does baptism precede belief or salvation. It always follows as a **public testimony** of what God has already done.

6. Why the Order Matters Theologically

To say that water baptism is required for salvation is to:

- **Add works to grace** (Galatians 2:21)
- Undermine the **sufficiency of the cross**
- Confuse **symbol with substance**
- Deny that the Holy Spirit seals the believer at faith

The moment you insert water into the gospel, you've added **something man does** to what **God alone accomplishes**. That's heresy.

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...”

— *Titus 3:5*

7. Cornelius Was Baptized to Publicly Testify—Not to Be Justified

Once Cornelius believed and received the Holy Ghost, Peter said:

“Can any man forbid water...?”

This was a rhetorical question. The answer was obvious. Because they had already believed and been sealed, there was no **reason to withhold baptism**. It wasn't to complete salvation—it was to **proclaim it**.

Peter then **commanded** baptism, not because it saved them, but because it was the **natural next step** of obedience.

8. Baptism Is the First Step of Discipleship—Not the Last Step of Salvation

The Great Commission says:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, **baptizing them...**”

— *Matthew 28:19*

Jesus told His disciples to baptize **those they had taught**—not to teach after baptizing.

Baptism is the **introductory ordinance** of the Christian life. It is the believer's **first act of obedience**, not their ticket into eternal life.

9. Obedience Without Faith Is Empty; Faith Without Obedience Is Disobedient

Let's be clear:

- Baptism **doesn't save**.
- But the **saved should be baptized**.

To refuse baptism is to disobey Christ. To exalt baptism as a requirement for salvation is to **pervert the gospel**.

Obedience flows from salvation. It doesn't cause it.

10. Why Water Baptism Still Matters

Though it doesn't save, water baptism is not optional for the believer.

Why?

- It **testifies** to the world: "I belong to Jesus."
- It **pictures** the gospel: death, burial, and resurrection.
- It **marks** a public break from the old life.
- It **obeys** Christ's command.

It is the **wedding ring** of the Christian faith. It doesn't create the union—but it **celebrates it**.

11. The Danger of Baptismal Regeneration

To insist that baptism is required for salvation is to preach:

- **Another gospel** (Galatians 1:6–9)
- A gospel of **grace plus works**
- A message that **enslaves**, not sets free

If baptism saves, then:

- The thief on the cross wasn't saved.
- Cornelius wasn't truly saved until after the water.
- Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is contradictory.

But we know:

“Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”

— *1 Corinthians 1:17*

12. Clarifying Acts 2:38 – “For the remission of sins”

Many point to Acts 2:38 and say, “See? Baptism is for the remission of sins!”

We addressed this in Essay 5, but in short:

- The phrase “for the remission of sins” can also mean “**because of**”—as in Luke 5:14 and Matthew 12:41.
- In Acts 10, Peter preaches **faith for forgiveness**—and then baptizes after.
- If Acts 2:38 teaches baptismal regeneration, Acts 10 contradicts it.

But Scripture does not contradict itself—**tradition does**.

13. Cornelius: A Model for the Modern Believer

Cornelius is every Gentile believer. He:

- Sought God
- Heard the gospel
- Believed
- Received the Spirit
- Was baptized

That is the divine order.

It is the **clearest pattern** of salvation followed by baptism in the entire Book of Acts.

14. What This Means for the Church Today

- Baptize believers—not infants, not unbelievers
- Emphasize **faith alone** in preaching—not faith plus water
- Treat baptism as **obedience**, not **obligation**

- Defend the gospel of grace from all additions—including ritual

A church that teaches baptismal regeneration **preaches a false gospel**. Period.

15. Final Summary: The Biblical Order of Salvation

Step	Description	Reference
1	Hear the gospel	Acts 10:36–43
2	Believe the gospel	Acts 10:44
3	Receive the Holy Spirit	Acts 10:44–45
4	Water baptism	Acts 10:47–48

This is the **Spirit-led pattern**.

Any theology that flips that order—making water come before faith or salvation—**twists the gospel**.

Conclusion: Water Can't Save—But It Can Testify

Baptism is not the **root** of salvation—it is the **fruit**.

It is not a **means of grace**—but a **response to grace**.

It is not a **step toward life**—but a **step after receiving it**.

Cornelius' story confirms what Paul would later preach clearly:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

— *Ephesians 2:8–9*

Water has its place—but **not in the plan of salvation**.

Let us preach what Peter preached:

“That through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

That's the gospel.

Faith first.

Water follows.

Forever.

Conclusion to the Series: Baptism – Water and Spirit

As we close this 10-part journey through *Baptism: Water and Spirit*, one truth rises unmistakably above tradition, ritual, and confusion:

Salvation is by grace through faith—not by water, not by works, not by man.

From the first essay to the last, we've opened the Scriptures and let the Word of God speak plainly:

- The **baptism that saves** is not physical but **spiritual**—a supernatural act of God that places the believer into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- **Water baptism** follows salvation, never precedes it. It is a public **testimony**, not a private transaction. It's the **wedding ring**, not the covenant.
- The **mode of baptism** matters because it **pictures death, burial, and resurrection**. Sprinkling may be religious, but immersion is biblical.
- Misused verses, misunderstood traditions, and centuries of ecclesiastical fog have buried the simplicity of the gospel. This series digs it back up.

We have seen:

- Cornelius saved **before** he touched water.
- The thief on the cross welcomed into paradise **without** a drop.
- Paul declaring he was sent **not to baptize, but to preach the gospel** (1 Corinthians 1:17).
- And every soul who believed the gospel in Acts was baptized only **after** they received the Word.

The conclusion is unmistakable:

Water baptism is obedience—never salvation.

To preach otherwise is to preach **another gospel**, and Paul had strong words for that in Galatians 1:6–9.

So what now?

If you've trusted in Christ alone, you've already been baptized by the Holy Ghost. You are buried with Christ, raised with Him, sealed, justified, and made a new creature.

If you've never followed that salvation with water baptism, it's time to obey—not to get saved, but because you **already are**.

And if you've trusted in water, ritual, or religious performance, it's time to turn to the cross. **Water can't save you—but the blood of Jesus can.**

Let this series serve as both **correction** and **clarification** in a confused world:

- Baptism is a testimony.
- Baptism is not a transaction.
- Baptism is for the believer—not the unbeliever, not the infant, and not the unsaved.

When you separate water from salvation and place it where it belongs—**after the cross**—you preserve the **gospel of grace**, protect the **testimony of the church**, and honor the **Word of God**.

So rise from this series with your faith fixed on Christ, your confidence in His finished work, and your understanding anchored in Scripture—not tradition.

You've been baptized **by the Spirit**. Now walk in **newness of life**.