

House to House Heart to Heart

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IS BAPTISM NECESSARY? —Objections Considered

Allen Webster

Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12). Satan is the darkness of the world (Acts 26:18; Ephesians 6:12). Jesus' words illuminate the path to heaven (Colossians 1:13). Satan's lies cloud that way (2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; 11:3).

The devil has created a fog of confusion around one of Jesus' most important commands: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

This is an easily understood sentence, but Satan has a pocketful of objections.

OBJECTION 1: MARK 16:16 SHOULD NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE

Mark 16:9-20 is found in more than five thousand ancient manuscripts. Irenaeus quoted it as early as AD 170.

The two well-known manuscripts that omit it either leave space for it (Vaticanus) or have Mark 16:8 at the bottom of the page (Sinaiticus), as if a page is missing. Manuscripts are imperfect. They typically have omissions. (Their value is in compiling and comparing the more than 5,000 manuscripts to get the complete picture of the New Testament.)

These two, dating back to the fourth century, also omit other words/phrases/verses/sections from Jesus' biographies (e.g., part of the Lord's prayer, most of John 8, the ascension in Luke 24:51) and whole chapters from the New Testament.

Ending Mark at 16:8 closes the book in fear with no post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. Satan would love to leave Mark 16:16 out of the Bible. The Holy Spirit put it in.

OBJECTION 2: BAPTISM IS UNESSENTIAL BECAUSE BAPTISM IS NOT REPEATED IN THE SECOND CLAUSE

Some say, "Only faith is required because Jesus did not say, 'is not baptized shall be condemned.'"

Suppose Noah had said, "He who believes in the flood and enters the ark shall be saved; but he who does not believe shall be drowned." Would entering the ark be unnecessary?

Mark 16:16 is a compound-complex sentence (has two independent clauses joined to one or more dependent clauses),



which is why it is unnecessary to repeat baptism in the second clause.

- First independent: he shall be saved.
- First dependent: who believes and is baptized.
- Second independent: he shall be condemned.
- Second dependent: who does not believe.

The clause, “who believes and is baptized,” is used as an adjective to modify “he.” It tells which “he” shall be saved—the “he” “who believes and is baptized.”¹

The clause, “who does not believe,” modifies the “he” that shall be condemned. To be condemned, it is unnecessary to refuse both belief and baptism. While both are required to be saved, refusing only one results in being lost.²

OBJECTION 3: IT DOES NOT MATTER WHAT ONE BELIEVES ABOUT BAPTISM, ONLY THAT ONE BELIEVES IN JESUS

Jehovah is the God of truth (Hebrews 6:18). He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). Two contradictory statements—baptism is necessary; baptism is unnecessary—cannot both be true.

What one believes matters, for only truth sets man free (John 8:32). Jesus’ way is well-defined—the way, the truth, the life—and exclusive. No man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6). His words will judge humanity (John 12:48). Changing the gospel nullifies the gospel (Mark 7:9; Galatians 1:6–10).

Is one doctrine as good as another? No one wants a pharmacist who believes one medicine is as good as another. No one wants an open-minded banker. Suppose you made a deposit, and the banker said, “All accounts are the same. I will use my account number. It is easier than finding yours.” Would that be satisfactory?

One cannot separate believing in Jesus from believing in Jesus’ teachings

(including baptism). One must both believe and do His teachings to love Him and call Him Lord (John 14:15; Luke 6:46).

OBJECTION 4: BAPTISM IS A WORK, AND MAN CANNOT BE SAVED BY WORKS

The Bible teaches that man cannot be saved by his works (Ephesians 2:9). It also teaches that man must be saved by his works (Acts 2:40; James 2:14–17, 24). Is this a contradiction? No, it speaks of different kinds of works.

Man cannot save himself by meritorious works (Ephesians 2:9), keeping Moses’ Law (Galatians 2:16), or legalism (Galatians 3:10–14). The law of the Spirit of life sets one free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

Salvation is freely given; it cannot be earned. Paul said, “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ” (Romans 6:23). “Free gift” (*charisma*) is in the same word family as grace (*charis*) and indicates something given by favor. In this passage it is contrasted with wages (*opsonion*)—a deserved payment.³

On the other hand, salvation is never awarded in the absence of submission. Jesus said that not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom; but “he who does the will of My Father” (Matthew 7:21). No one can be saved without obeying God’s requirements contained in the gospel (John 3:16; Acts 2:38; Hebrews 5:8–9).

Works of obedience are not meritorious works. Both faith and baptism are works of obedience, but neither is a work originated by man. When the disciples asked Jesus what to do to “work the works of God,” He responded: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:29). He was not referring to a work God performs on a person, but a work that God requires. Faith is a work of God that man must do to be saved, as is baptism.

One could say that baptism is less of a work than faith or repentance. Faith requires hearing, learning, reasoning, studying, and deciding (Romans 10:17). Repentance requires stopping bad habits and beginning good ones (Matthew 3:8).

Baptism requires only passive obedience—“be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Baptism is a one-time act that lasts perhaps a minute, during which the sinner is passive—he simply submits to immersion, and more importantly, to God—the One who actively operates in baptism (Colossians 2:12).

OBJECTION 5: IT IS BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT, NOT WATER, THAT SAVES

Paul said there is “one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5) that all Christians have in common. Yet there are several baptisms mentioned in the New Testament: Moses’ (1 Corinthians 10:1–4), John’s (Mark 1:4–5), suffering (Luke 12:49–50), fire (Matthew 3:11), the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4), and water (Acts 2:38; 8:36–38).

Which is required for one to become a Christian? Water baptism is commanded (Acts 10:48); Spirit baptism is not (it was promised only to those chosen for it, Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Water baptism is administered by men (Acts 8:35–40); Spirit baptism cannot be administered by men (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:1–4; 10:44).

Mark 16:15–16 is commonly called the Great Commission—the disciples’ marching orders. Acts records their march—going into the world with the gospel. What kind of baptism did they preach? Water baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 35–40; 9:18; 10:45–48; 16:14–15, 33; 18:8; 19:1–6).

OBJECTION 6: SINNERS ARE SAVED BY FAITH ONLY—WHICH EXCLUDES BAPTISM

One should be careful using “only” or “alone” regarding salvation. Salvation is by grace (Titus 2:11), but not grace alone (Titus 2:12). Salvation is by Jesus’ blood (Ephesians 1:7), but not by Jesus’ blood alone (otherwise all would be saved, 2 Corinthians 5:15; cf. Matthew 7:13). Salvation is by faith (John 3:16; Acts 10:43; 13:39; 16:31; Romans 5:1), but not by faith only (James 2:19, 24; Galatians 5:6; John 12:42–43). Salvation is by repentance (Acts 11:18), but not by repentance only

(John 8:24). Salvation is by confession (1 John 2:23), but not by confession only (Romans 10:9–10). Salvation is by baptism (Acts 2:38), but not by baptism alone (Acts 2:36–38; 16:31).

To “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” does not mean to believe Jesus of Nazareth existed like one believes Adam, Alexander, Aristotle, Napoleon, Nebuchadnezzar, or Plato lived. It means to place trust, faith, and hope in Him. The other men lived, but are dead. Jesus died, but lives (1 Corinthians 15:1–13, 20). Believing in Jesus includes having a relationship with Him by following (trusting, obeying) Him (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 15:14; Hebrews 5:8–9).

For forgiveness to occur, the offended party must be satisfied. Therefore, that party must give conditions by which he will pardon. Since Jesus is the Savior, only He has authority to stipulate salvation’s terms. He did this in Mark 16:16. Contradictory human plans of salvation—such as human works, faith only, or praying for pardon—set aside Christ’s authority, just as Jewish traditions made void God’s word (Mark 7:13).

Compare God’s doctrine to man’s:

God: Belief+Baptism=Salvation (Mark 16:16).

Man: Belief–Baptism=Salvation.

God: Repentance+Baptism=Salvation (Acts 2:38).

Man: Repentance–Baptism=Salvation.

God: Sinners baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27).

Man: Sinners not baptized into Christ.

God: Baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16).

Man: Baptism does not wash away sin.

God: Baptism does save (1 Peter 3:21).

Man: Baptism does not save.

OBJECTION 7: THE THIEF ON THE CROSS WAS NOT BAPTIZED, SO I DO NOT NEED TO BE

Jesus had authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10–11). He did so without baptism in several cases, such as:

- A paralytic (Mark 2:5).
- A sinful woman (Luke 7:37–48).
- A tax collector (Luke 19:1–9).
- A thief on the cross (Luke 23:32–43).

When Jesus saved these individuals, Mark 16:16 did not exist. He saved them before His death; He gave this command after His resurrection.

Interpreting Scripture requires observing context. Noah was told to build an ark, Abraham to kill a son, and the Jews to offer sacrifices, but these do not apply today. The thief lived under the Old Law.

With a covenant, the death of the one who made it is necessary (Hebrews 9:17). Jesus’ covenant (New Testament) became operative after the cross (Colossians 2:14). Its terms were not preached until after the thief’s death (Acts 2).

Great Commission baptism reenacts Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. How could the thief be baptized into His death, buried with Him, and raised with Him (Romans 6:3–4, 17; John 19:32–34; 1 Corinthians 15:17), when Jesus had not yet died, been buried, or been raised?

The terms given in Jesus’ last will and testament (the New Testament) are clear, and they are intended to last to the world’s end (Matthew 28:20).

A person may give away possessions however he pleases before his death, but once he dies, his will must be honored. Christ died, and His will, which requires a penitent believer to be baptized (Romans 6:3), must be honored.

Jesus gave us Mark 16:16; let us not allow Satan to take it away.

Endnotes:

¹ English instructor Dan Cates wrote, “To go a little deeper, further, the coordinating conjunction, ‘and,’ joins things of equal grammatical rank. In this case, the one that would be saved must both believe AND be baptized, shown by the very word joining the two” (personal correspondence).

² Cates also observed, “The Greek literally says, ‘The believing and being baptized (one) will be saved; but the disbelieving (one) shall be condemned.’ Ironically, adding baptism to the second clause would mean grammatically that merely disbelieving would not result in condemnation.”

³ Wayne Jackson, www.Christiancourier.com.

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Bible Quiz

VOLUME 27:7

Send us your answers to receive a free Bible bookmark. We will grade and return your questions and enclose the bookmark: “God’s Plan for Saving Man” as a way of saying thanks for spending time in the Word (quantities may be limited).

Starts with the Letter “P”

Directions: Find answers here: Genesis 38:29; 39:1; Leviticus 23:5; 1 Samuel 1:1–6; Matthew 3:7; Acts 13:9; Romans 16:1, 3; Revelation 1:9. Questions are taken from the New King James Version.

1. Joseph was sold as a slave to _____.
2. Jewish festival to celebrate the Exodus: _____.
3. _____ taunted Hannah for being unable to bear children.
4. Greek island where John was in exile when he wrote Revelation: _____.
5. Better known (Greek) name of Saul of Tarsus: _____.
6. Priscilla and Aquila travelled with this apostle as “fellow workers in Christ Jesus”: _____.
7. Jewish leaders who emphasized strict obedience to the Law (members included Nicodemus and Gamaliel): _____.
8. Servant of the church in Cenchrea: _____.
9. One twin son of Judah and Tamar: _____.

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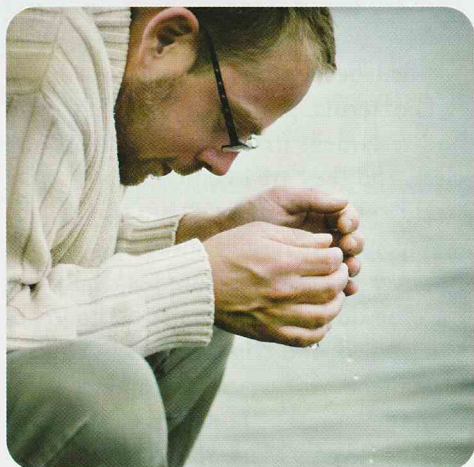
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WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SINS?

One of the most poignant scenes in literature is in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Lady Macbeth persuades her husband, a Thane of Scotland, to take a dagger and in the night plunge it into the heart of Duncan, the king of Scotland, who was their guest.

Through a fiendish hope of securing the crown for himself, he takes a dagger and plunges it into Duncan's heart. The blood flowed like a fountain and covered his hands.

When he comes back into the chamber, Lady Macbeth says, "You must wash away this filthy evidence of the deed you've done. Go, a little water will rid us of this crime."

As Macbeth walks to the fountain to wash the blood from his hands, he says, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood from my hands? No, rather, this my hand will the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red."

All of the waters in all of the oceans of all the world do not suffice to wash the stain of sin from our souls. Only Jesus' blood has the power to cleanse the guilt from our hands. Paul wrote, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

—Anonymous

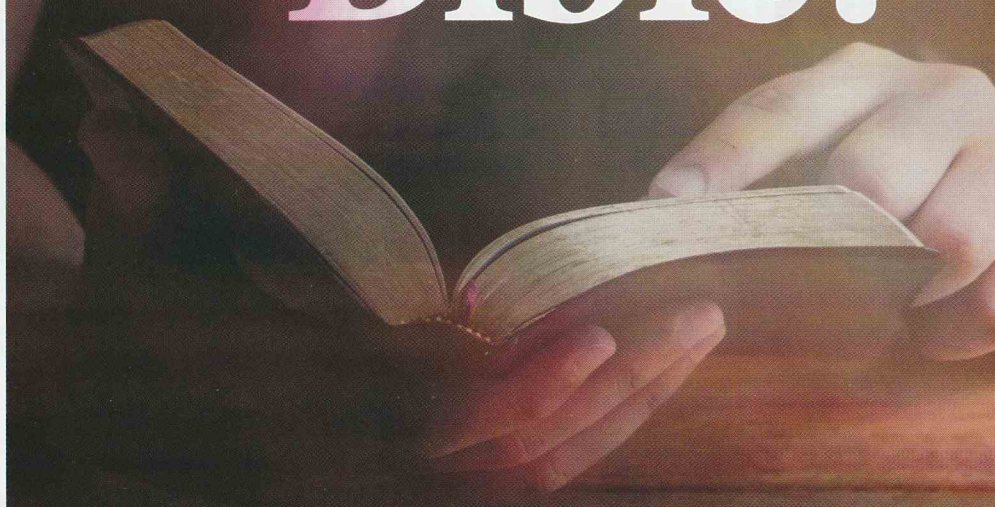
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