

Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration

1. While baptism is important, care must be taken not to embrace the idea that baptism is essential for salvation.
2. The Scriptures do not teach baptism regeneration. Rather, every person is saved by faith alone in Christ alone.
3. In discussing the issue of baptismal regeneration, it is best to start with the plain teaching of the Bible.
4. The following verses state plainly, and simply, that if a person trusts in Jesus Christ, then that individual has everlasting life, is not condemned, and shall not come into condemnation. Such a person is saved.
 - *John 3:15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 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 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*
 - *John 3:36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*
 - *John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*
 - *John 6:40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*
 - *John 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*
 - *Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*
 - *Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*
 - *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

5. Unfortunately, there are selected texts, appealed to especially by the Church of Christ, and Christian Church, to teach the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.
- *Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

Special Note.

Believing does not include baptism for the text says, “*He that believeth and is baptized.*” Nor does baptism complete the salvation of the soul. What baptism does do is give an outward expression of an inward transaction. Of course, it is good for a person to be baptized immediately when saved as in the case of the Philippian jailer who was baptized at midnight (Acts 16), and the Ethiopian eunuch who was baptized immediately on the highway.

The Philippian jailer believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and he was saved. Because he was saved he was baptized (Acts 16:31, 33).

The Ethiopian was not baptized in order to get salvation for we read that he asked Peter what might hinder him from being baptized. Peter said, “*Nothing, as long as you believe.*”

Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Let the word go forth that a person should be baptized if, and only if, they believe in Christ in their heart.

- *John 3:5 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.*

Special Note.

“I know that there are those who tell us that to be born of water means to be born of baptism. But no one ever received the new life by water baptism. You can search your Bible in vain for anything like that. It is not there. It is not in the Word of God. Nowhere is baptism in Scripture likened to birth. It rather speaks of death. We are buried with Him by baptism into death. Water baptism is the picture of the burial of the old man, not a picture of a second birth.

Well, then, what is the water by which we are born again? Go through the Word of God. Nowhere do we find people being born of literal water. Trace “water” through John’s writings. You will find that it is the recognized symbol for the Word of God. David asked the question in Psalm 119:9,

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.” And in the fourth chapter of John, Jesus, speaking to the woman of Samaria, said, *“Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (4:14). What is the water that Jesus gives? It is the water of the Word. It is the testimony of the gospel. *“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country”* (Proverbs 25:25). *“Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely”* (Revelation 22:17).

What is the water of life? It is the gospel message. We read in Ephesians 5:25-27, *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”* And Jesus says to His disciples, *“Now ye are clean through the word”* (John 15:3). So we are to be born again by the Word of God, brought home to our hearts and consciences by the Holy Spirit.

Here are two men sitting side by side as a preacher, proclaiming the gospel of God, perhaps quotes some such verse of Scripture as, *“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15). One man pays no attention. The other man looks up and says, *“What! He came to save sinners! I am a sinner. I will trust Him.”* What led him to do that? The Holy Spirit using the Word as the means of his second birth. *“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”*

The Lord makes it very clear that there is a great distinction between the flesh and Spirit. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* You can do anything you like with the flesh, but it does not turn it into spirit. If you baptize it, it is baptized flesh. If you make it religious, it is religious flesh. Flesh remains flesh to the very end. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again”* (Ironside Commentaries).

- *Acts 2:38 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.*

Special Note.

The word “for” is often interpreted to mean, “in order to get” the remission of sins. However, the Greek word “*eis*” can be properly translated “because of” or, “with reference to” the remission of sins. Had Peter wanted to convey the idea of being baptized in order to be saved he would have used the Greek preposition, “*hina*.”

But then again, even the word “for” can be understood. Dr. John R. Rice notes that, “A man is paid for his work already done, not in order to get him to work. A woman is praised for her beauty, not in order to make her beautiful. A child is punished for his disobedience, not in order to get him to be disobedient.”

- *Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*
- *Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

Special Note.

The great question is this: “Does baptism wash away sins?” Dr. H. A. Ironside comments. “Do not link the expression “wash away thy sins” simply with baptism. Even though baptism is a picture of the washing away of sin, no sin can be purged by water. Sin is only purged by the precious blood of Christ. But there is a sense in which when Paul was baptized, his past was all washed away. He had been a bitter hater of the name of the Lord Jesus, but when he went down into the water of baptism, all that disappeared. He came forth not to be a persecutor but a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God. The past was gone. Henceforth he walked in newness of life” (*Ironside Commentaries*). The church has always taught that only God can forgive sins.

“What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

Oh! precious is the flow
 That makes me white as snow;
 No other fount I know,
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my cleansing this I see—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 For my pardon this my plea—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Nothing can my sin erase
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 Naught of works, 'tis all of grace—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

This is all my hope and peace—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
 This is all my righteousness—
 Nothing but the blood of Jesus!”

- *Titus 3:5 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;*

Special Note.

“The washing is the application of the Word of God to heart and conscience, thus producing through the Spirit’s power, the new nature. Having been thus washed from our old behavior, we are daily being renewed by the Holy Spirit, which God shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (*Ironside Commentaries*).

- *1 Peter 3:21 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:*

Special Note.

Peter uses baptism as a figure of speech in order to say that Noah and eight souls were saved by water. This does not mean that you and I and every other believer will be saved by water for water is a figure, a symbol, of salvation. What saves a soul is faith in Christ represented by the ark. The only people who got wet in Noah’s day were those who were outside the ark, they were outside Christ. Peter states plainly that baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh, a reference to the old sinful, carnal nature. Baptism is simply “the answer of a good conscious toward God.” A person believes in Christ, knows that sins are forgiven, and so with a good conscious toward God is baptized.

6. The “one baptism” which is shared with every believer is found in Ephesians 4. The “one baptism” is the Spirit baptism whereby the believer is identified with the body of Christ.
- *Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*
7. It is important to challenge and refute the teaching of baptismal regeneration for several reasons.
- The simplicity of the gospel is destroyed when the necessity of baptism for salvation is brought into the discussion. The thief on the cross was not baptized and yet he went to be with Jesus that same day. *Luke 23:43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*
 - Baptism is an act of work that, if depended upon, violates the Reformed principle of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone. *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*
 - Baptism for salvation is no different than someone believing in faith in Christ plus moral reformation, or Christ plus church membership, or Christ plus the sacraments. Salvation can never be a combination of grace plus works. *Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*
 - Wrong doctrine will lead to wrong practices such as baptizing the infant and declaring that it is nothing more than a baby dedication. Not so. In many mainline denominations the purpose of baptizing a baby is for remission of sins. A Lutheran pastor once told me, “I believe that at baptism I was regenerated and so salvation is mine to lose.”
 - Baptismal regeneration promotes a way of salvation that is different from how a person was saved in the Old Testament or the New Testament.

In the Old Testament, a person was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as He was revealed. *Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

In the New Testament. *John 3:16 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.*