

# Baptism and Denominationalism

What the Bible says about Baptism is different from what Denominations teach

## Statement of Belief

The Scriptures say that baptism is a commandment of God:

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” ([Mark 16:16](#))

Baptism is the immersion in water for the remission of sins:

And Peter said unto them, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” ([Acts 2:38](#)).

Baptism allows one to be buried with Christ:

...having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead ([Colossians 2:12](#)).

Baptism leads to salvation:

...which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ([1 Peter 3:21](#)).

## The Need for Baptism

There are some denominations today that teach that baptism is not a physical action that should be performed; instead, they teach that when Jesus and the Apostles mention baptism, they are speaking about a “spiritual” act. This “spiritual” act is not physical nor has any form of physicality. Do the Scriptures teach that baptism is only a “spiritual” action?

Let us consider the example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch from [Acts 8:38](#):

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

By all accounts, Philip physically went down into the water with the eunuch and the eunuch was physically baptized. The example of Peter in [Acts 10:47-48](#) is also telling:

For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?"

If Peter were speaking about a "spiritual" baptism that does not involve one getting into the water, why would he speak about the physical substance into which one is baptized? How could water factor into Peter's mind if baptism were simply some "spiritual" act? Further, what need would there be for any Christian to assist another in some "spiritual" act, yet we see in the Scriptures countless times that a Christian baptizes someone into Christ (cf. above, [Acts 16:31-33](#), [Acts 19:1-9](#), etc.)?

Therefore, we can see from the Scriptures that baptism is a physical action that takes place when one desires to become a Christian.

## Infant Baptism and "Original Sin"

Many denominations today teach that children and even infants must be baptized in order to be cleansed of sin. Let us examine the progression of this belief and to see what the Scriptures teach.

The first premise for baptizing infants is an inference based on the content of some of the Scriptures. The argument, generally, goes as follows:

**Argument:** When Cornelius and the Philippian jailer believed, their whole households were baptized. Thus, children were probably baptized also.

**Answer:** This argument is based upon an assumption about the term "household." Within the texts in question, [Acts 10:2](#) and [Acts 16:24-38](#), we also read the following about these families:

...a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always ([Acts 10:2](#)).

And they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately ([Acts 16:31-33](#)).

We can see in [Acts 10:2](#) that "all the house" of Cornelius is said to fear God. Regarding the house of the jailer in [Acts 16:31](#), we can safely say that the jailer's household also must believe if its constituents will be saved, considering that no other Scripture witnesses that an entire family can be saved on account of the belief of one member. This evidence allows us to reach two possible conclusions:

1. Everyone in the households of Cornelius and/or the jailer were old enough to understand the Gospel and believe in its message, and therefore every single person believed and was baptized.

2. Luke expects his audience to understand that his use of the term "all" involves some hyperbole: he is not trying to say that literally every member of the house of Cornelius and/or the jailer believed and were baptized, but that everyone in those houses who were of sufficient age to understand the Gospel believed in it and were baptized.

Either option demonstrates that the inference made concerning these two texts is not valid: just because a "household" is baptized does not mean that any and all children present are baptized.

As the years progressed, it became clear that a compelling reason needed to be found to justify the baptism of infants, and the doctrine of "original sin" fit the bill. "Original sin" is defined somewhat differently by different denominations, but the basic idea is that sin is inheritable. Most denominations do not teach that individuals inherit specific sins from their parents, but instead believe that children are born with a sinful nature and therefore are sinners requiring baptism.

The main difficulty with "original sin" is found in the way Jesus speaks about children in [Matthew 18:1-4](#) and [Mark 9:35-37](#):

In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

And he sat down, and called the twelve; and he saith unto them, "If any man would be first, he shall be last of all, and minister of all."

And he took a little child, and set him in the midst of them: and taking him in his arms, he said unto them, "Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me."

Jesus indicates that if anyone desires to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he or she must be like a little child. It is well-known that if an example is not valid, an argument cannot be supported by it. Therefore, if children have sin against them that requires baptism, how can it be that Jesus presents a child as an example of one who would enter the Kingdom of Heaven? If we are to aspire to be as a child, but a child is still in sin, how can we enter the Kingdom? How can it be that receiving a little child is as receiving the Son and the Father if the little child is in his sins? The conclusion is clear: children do not have sin against them. They are in a state of innocence.

Nevertheless, to defend original sin, many will first turn to passages describing how God will visit the iniquity of fathers upon children (cf. [Exodus 20:5](#)). Regardless, the Scriptures show also that the punishment of sin is only for those who sin:

"The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" ([Deuteronomy 24:16](#)).

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)).

It would appear on the surface that we have a contradiction between these passages: some say that sons suffer the iniquities of their father, and some say that each soul suffers for their own sins. We can, however, reconcile these passages in one of two ways:

1. God perhaps does not visit the iniquity on the first generation of sinful people, but perhaps on a later generation of sinful people. Notice, for instance, that the exile of Israel and Judah are carried out not under faithful kings like Hezekiah or Josiah, but unfaithful kings, Hoshea and Zedekiah ([2 Kings 17-18, 25](#)).
2. God describes the propensity of children to follow in their parents' footsteps. Do we not even today say, "The apple does not fall far from the tree?" If the fathers involve themselves in some sin, it is very likely that children will also. This is not an absolute and hard and fast rule, but nevertheless often accurate.

Regardless, we do not need to infer from these passages that there is some form of "original sin" that each generation inherits from their forefathers.

Many will then cite [Psalm 51:5](#):

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

When we look at the evidence we have seen above from Jesus' words in the Gospels, we get the strong impression from the whole of the Scriptures that children do not inherit sin. Since we know that the sum of God's word is true ([Psalm 119:160](#)) and without contradiction, we must consider the context of the passage and see whether there are some mitigating circumstances. [Psalm 51](#) represents a psalm, a form of poetry, and a psalm which was written by David after his sin with Bathsheba had been made known (cf. [2 Samuel 12](#)). His great grief, no doubt, led to the use of hyperbole, thinking himself so sinful that he was born that way. As we will see, many other passages that are not written in poetry declare children to be without sin. It is also possible to read "in iniquity" and "in sin" in [Psalm 51:5](#) as David saying that he was born in a sinful world, not that he himself actively had sin against him from birth.

It is also argued when people read the declarations of Paul in [Romans 3:10](#) and [3:23](#) that because "all" are not righteous and "all" have sinned, therefore, children are also a part of this group:

...as it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one."

...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.

Do these verses teach that children are sinners? Let us examine the passage that Paul quotes in [Romans 3:10ff](#), [Psalm 53:1-3](#):

The fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God." Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God. Every one of them is gone back; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

We see here that not only do none do good, none even know God. Do children "know" God? Can children understand fully the precepts of the Lord, especially infants? By no means! They are not capable of understanding such things. Therefore, are we to believe that God includes them in the category of those who choose to not do God's will nor to know Him?

We can understand, then, that Paul uses a bit of hyperbole to make his point. The "all" of [Romans 3:10](#) and [3:23](#) refers to all people who are capable of knowing good from evil, and not every creature. This is comparable to Matthew's use of "all" in [Matthew 3:5](#):

Then went out unto him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan.

Shall we believe from this that every single inhabitant of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordan river area came to John? That is not the intent; the point is to show that a large number of people came out to see John. We use the term in the same way today. Therefore, considering the evidence in [Matthew 18:1-4](#) and [Mark 9:35-37](#), we can see that Paul is not referring to every single human ever but all who are capable of knowing good from evil.

[Romans 5:12-17](#) is often used to try to show that we have inherited sin from Adam:

Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned— for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of him that was to come. But not as the trespass, so also is the free gift. For if by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many. And not as through one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment came of one unto condemnation, but the free gift came of many trespasses unto justification. For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace

and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ.

While this passage may give the impression that we inherit sin from Adam, when we read it closely, we see that Paul says no such thing. The text never says directly that anyone inherits actual sin from Adam; it does say that sin entered the world because of the transgression, and that death was its consequence, but never that we actually inherited sin. Yes, we die because sin entered the world through Adam, but that does not mean that we actually inherit Adam's sin. We can read this passage consistently with the rest of Scripture: sin is not only present but also permeates the world, death is present in the world because of sin, and that climate will compel all capable persons to sin, but sin is not inherited.

"Original sin," then, is not consistent with the entire witness of the Scripture ([Psalm 119:160](#)). The main justification of infant baptism, then, is without Scriptural merit. When, then, should one be baptized? The Scriptures testify that one submits to baptism having believed in Jesus Christ, confessing His name, and repenting of one's sins (cf. [Acts 16:31](#), [Romans 10:9](#), and [Acts 2:38](#)), and that one is baptized for the remission of one's sin ([Acts 2:38](#)). A person must be baptized when they have sinned, are separated from God (cf. [Isaiah 59:1](#)), and come to the realization of their need for salvation in Christ Jesus. As we have seen, in order to sin, one must need to know the difference between good and evil and choose the evil. Only then is one under the sentence of judgment. This moment varies by the individual, and some who have mental handicaps may never reach that moment. Baptism, then, should be done when one is mentally capable of doing so, realizing one's sin and need for salvation in Christ.

It should also be noted that since "infant baptism" is indeed of no value, since an infant has no sins to remit, infants are not really baptized but simply get wet. The Scriptures give no reason for confidence for anyone who would rely on their "baptism" as an infant. Such persons ought to consider the Scriptures discussed in this lesson and be immersed in water for the remission of their sin.

## Baptism is Immersion

Many in denominations teach that baptism need not be immersion, but can be sprinkling or pouring; all three are considered "modes" of baptism.

The main difficulty in this argument is found in the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*: to immerse, submerge, to make overwhelmed (i.e. fully wet) ([Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew/Greek Words](#)).

to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (of vessels sunk); to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self, bathe; to overwhelm ([Thayer's Greek Lexicon](#)).

The definition of "baptism" then, according to its use in the New Testament, does not allow for the idea of "sprinkling" or "pouring" or any idea of "modes" of baptism. Baptism is immersion. This reality is illustrated, in particular, by Paul in [Romans 6:4](#):

We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

While we realize that Paul is using the metaphor baptism as burial, the metaphor only makes sense if we realize that baptism is immersion. When we bury bodies, we do not sprinkle or pour dirt on them; we cover them in dirt. Baptism cannot be a burial unless one is covered in water. It is clear, then, that New Testament baptism is immersion.

## Tripartite Baptism

In some denominations, baptism is administered in three parts: one is dipped three times under the water, once each in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

While there is nothing particularly wrong with baptizing in this way, the Scriptures nowhere demand it. By all accounts, baptism was a singular immersion done in the name of (or by the authority of) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). Sometimes baptism is mentioned as done in the name of Jesus ([Acts 2:38](#)), and therefore it is entirely possible that some were baptized with only Jesus' name mentioned and therefore one immersion.

## Baptism in Running Water

There are some who would claim that baptism is only legitimate if it is done in running water. The fact that Jesus and many others were baptized in rivers and other such sources of moving water is cited as evidence (cf. [John 1:30-34](#), [John 4:1-2](#)).

While there is certainly nothing wrong with being baptized in running water, we see no such requirement in the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is likely that the Ethiopian eunuch in [Acts 8:36-39](#) was baptized in some pool of water in the desert that would not really be "running water". The only requirement in the Scriptures is for a person to be immersed in water; whether one is immersed in moving or non-moving water is a matter of liberty.

## Baptism is for Remission of Sin and Necessary for Salvation

The major difference between New Testament teachings and the teachings of many denominations concerns the nature of baptism. Most do not believe that baptism is the act that causes the remittance of sins and allows one to be saved; more often than not, denominations teach that believing, or believing and repentance, or some other action, allows one to be saved. Let us examine these arguments, beginning with disputations about the Scriptures involved:

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" ([Mark 16:16](#)).

**Argument:** [Mark 16:16](#) does not say that you must be baptized to be saved; after all, it only says that those who disbelieve are condemned. Nothing is said about those who believe yet are not baptized.

**Answer:** This argument “does not follow” (the official term used for this is *non sequitur*). Why would someone who disbelieves be baptized? They would not consider it! Furthermore, why would anyone who believed not be baptized? Every detailed account of conversion in the book of Acts includes a baptism. Ultimately, we are not out to speculate about what the text does not say, but to establish what the text does say is necessary: belief and baptism. To “believe and not be baptized” is to tread in very dangerous water.

**Argument:** [Mark 16:16](#) is invalid because textual evidence shows the text to possibly be a later addition.

**Answer:** It is true that a few very old manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark do not include [Mark 16:9-20](#); many important witnesses, however, do contain the passage, and the passage is questioned more on subjective grounds. Furthermore, the antiquity of the text is verified by its use by Irenaeus in the late second century (*Apostolic Constitution* 6.83). The feeling that it should be omitted comes, on admission, only on doctrinal evidence from scholars, that, “well, baptism for salvation is not spelled out anywhere else, hence, this is a later addition.” In the end, all New Testament textual critics will be forced to admit that the argument against the text is without sufficient evidence, and that there is little reason to believe that the text is false.

And Peter said unto them, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” ([Acts 2:38](#)).

**Argument:** Luke uses the Greek word *eis* in [Acts 2:38](#). This word does not necessarily mean “for”; it could also mean “since,” and thus read, “be baptized since you have been forgiven of your sins.”

**Answer:** Greek prepositions can mean a whole host of possibilities based on context and usage. The above is highly unlikely, especially in view of [Matthew 26:28](#):

“For this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins.”

“Unto remission of sins” in the above is the exact same phrase as used in [Acts 2:38](#), and *eis* is indeed the preposition rendered “unto”. No one would argue that Jesus is saying here that His blood is shed “because your sins have been remitted.” Why, then, should [Acts 2:38](#) be any different?

It is also telling that every single translation, even the interpretive translations, translate [Acts 2:38](#) as “for” as a statement of purpose. The argument does not stand.

**Argument:** Peter is preaching to the Jews, and his message is only relevant for the Jews.

**Answer:** While it is true that Jews are the direct audience of Peter in [Acts 2](#), the conclusion is not valid.

Peter's message is directed towards the Jews, yes, and uses themes familiar to the Jews. The Scriptures do show that the presentation of the Gospel varies based on the audience: consider Paul's preaching in [Acts 13:16-41](#) to a Jewish audience versus [Acts 17:22-31](#) to a Gentile audience. The substance of the message, however, remains the same, and Paul affirms that he preaches the same message as Peter in [Galatians 2:6-9](#):

But from those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth not man's person)–they, I say, who were of repute imparted nothing to me: but contrariwise, when they saw that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision.

If the message is the same, so would be the response to the message. Furthermore, the idea that baptism was required for Jews but not for Gentiles is at odds with [Acts 10:47-48](#), [Acts 16:31-33](#), and [1 Corinthians 1:14-16](#), all of which show that Gentiles also were baptized.

...which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ([1 Peter 3:21](#)).

**Argument:** Peter does not say that baptism saves you, but your clean conscience is what saves you.

**Answer:** [1 Peter 3:21](#) is yet another explicit statement showing the need for baptism, therefore, to refute it, one must turn to the manipulation of the text.

Peter here is saying that baptism is not a bath. Its intent is not to purge someone of dirt, but to clean one's conscience; after all, immediately after baptism, one is sinless. This clean conscience is the direct result of the remission of sin granted in baptism. Peter in fact affirms the efficacy of baptism. No one believes that there is any power in the water, the *ad hominem*s constantly used against us notwithstanding; the power is in Christ's blood and the appeal being made to God by being immersed in water for remission of sin. This is the immersion that saves.

Now that we have looked at the Scriptures, let us look at other arguments that are used against baptism.

**Argument:** Jesus, and only Jesus, has performed the work of salvation. We cannot add to His work, and baptism is an addition to His work.

**Answer:** No one would deny that the agent of salvation is Jesus the Christ. However, the letter to the Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus took our sins upon Him on the cross ([Hebrews 9:12-15](#)). Paul says this much about Christ's actions:

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, ([Philippians 2:5-11](#)).

Therefore, we see that Christ died on the cross for our sins and to perform the Father's will, which was for His Son to humble Himself so that He may be exalted and given all authority. This is important; since He has this authority, the terms of salvation come through Christ. Paul continued in his letter with [Philippians 2:12](#):

So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

After a discussion of Christ's authority, Paul says that we must continue to obey! Obedience is central to the reception of the work which Christ has done; we are only able to receive the salvation that comes through Christ when we are obedient to His will, as said in [2 Thessalonians 1:6-9](#):

If so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you, and to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

Without obedience, one is lost. Baptism is submissive obedience to Christ, commanded by Him, and we must follow through. To deny the need for obedience for salvation is to deny the New Testament plan of salvation.

**Argument:** Baptism is symbolic. Since God symbolically remits your sin, baptism is not necessary for salvation.

**Answer:** We recognize that the power in baptism is not in the water, but in the appeal in faith to God for the cleansing from sin (cf. [1 Peter 3:21](#)). We also recognize that the New Testament provides illustrations of the significance of baptism, as can be seen in [Romans 6:3-7](#):

Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin.

Baptism is likened to a death and resurrection, the end of the man of sin and the raising of the new man. Does the fact that baptism can be understood in symbolic terms mean that we can dispense with the actual physical baptism? An appropriate parallel is the Lord's Supper: the bread and the fruit of the vine represent the body and blood of our Lord, but no one would say that we are not to physically partake of these emblems because they have symbolic value. As with the Lord's Supper, so with baptism: both of these events are rich in symbolic value, but we nevertheless need to physically engage in them.

**Argument:** Baptism does not automatically mean that one is immersed in water; it can mean, and does for Christians, that one is baptized in the Holy Spirit.

**Answer:** Much has been said regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit in [Pentecostalism/The Charismatic Movement: What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?](#). There the evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit is considered: it is seen that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is only mentioned in connection with two specific events for two specific purposes, and both times it was done by God alone: on the day of Pentecost, as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Joel (cf. [Acts 1:4-5](#), [Acts 2:1-36](#), [Joel 2:28-32](#)), and when God showed Peter that Gentiles were to receive the Word of life ([Acts 10:44-45](#), [11:15-16](#)). It is also seen that the usual means of receiving the Holy Spirit was to have the "laying on of hands" from an Apostle ([Acts 8:14-17](#), [Acts 19:1-6](#)).

Baptism in water, however, is explicitly identified in [Acts 8:36-39](#) and also in [Acts 10:47-48](#), right after Cornelius was baptized with the Holy Spirit. Since baptism in water was the standard form of baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit was only given in special circumstances by God for specific purposes, we can see clearly that baptism in water is the "one baptism" in [Ephesians 4:5](#).

**Retort:** Many times baptism is mentioned without water.

**Answer:** Indeed, many times we read of someone being baptized with nothing stating that it was "in water". The passages likewise do not state that they were baptized in the Spirit, either. We must look at the passages and see if there are any indicators regarding what is under discussion.

In many passages it is clear that baptism in the Spirit is not under consideration. In [Acts 2:38](#), baptism precedes the "gift of the Holy Spirit", and therefore the baptism is not in the Holy Spirit. The Samaritans in [Acts 8:5-17](#) and the disciples of John in [Acts 19:1-6](#) are said to have first been baptized and then later had hands laid on them so as to receive the Holy Spirit, demonstrating that their baptism was not in the Spirit.

Furthermore, God is the only one who administers the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and is done not by the intent of man but by the intent of God, as seen in [Acts 2](#) and [10](#). Therefore, other examples in the Scripture when persons submit to baptism (cf. [Acts 9:18](#), [Acts 16:15](#), [Acts 16:33](#), [Acts 18:18](#), etc.), all indications show that they were baptized in water, not in the Spirit.

We can see, then, that even if immersion in water is not explicitly mentioned, all evidence points to that conclusion in all the passages cited.

**Retort:** [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) indicates that we are all baptized in the Spirit.

**Answer:** Let us consider [1 Corinthians 12:13](#):

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.

The question we must ask is whether Paul is trying to show that our baptism was in the Spirit or whether our baptism in water was done in accordance with the one Spirit. The context demonstrates that Paul's point is about the unity of Christians, how Christians are to work together in one body; therefore, Paul is not speaking about the nature of baptism per se, but that when we were immersed in water, we did so by one Spirit and were brought into one Body. We cannot understand this verse to be in contradiction with the mountain of evidence for immersion in water (cf. [Psalm 119:160](#)).

**Argument:** The Apostles were not baptized, yet they were certainly saved.

**Answer:** This argument presupposes that since the baptism of the Apostles is not revealed in the Scriptures that it did not happen. Such is not a wise presupposition; we are told that not everything that was done during Christ's ministry is revealed, nor could it really ever be ([John 20:30-31](#), [21:25](#)). It is entirely possible, therefore, that the Apostles were baptized and yet such was not revealed.

Furthermore, the idea that the Apostles were baptized is rendered more plausible by the evidence in [John 4:1-2](#):

When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples).

If the disciples were out baptizing people during Christ's ministry, it is very likely that they had already been baptized as well.

**Argument:** Cornelius was saved before baptism. Baptism, then, is not necessary to be saved.

**Answer:** Since no statement to this effect can be found in [Acts 10](#) or any other passage, to understand and respond to this argument, we must understand the underlying assumption driving it: if one has the Holy Spirit, one must be in a saved state. Is this assumption true?

While this assumption may have merit in the majority of cases, nevertheless, there are times when the Holy Spirit is upon a person who is not saved so as to accomplish God's purposes. As it is written in [2 Peter 1:21](#):

For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.

Peter makes no exception: if a man provides a prophecy, it is not by his will, but by God through the Holy Spirit. Having understood this, let us see what John says regarding Caiaphas in [John 11:49-52](#):

But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, "Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Now this he said not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.

John clearly says that Caiaphas "prophesied" regarding Jesus, since he was High Priest that year. Since no man can speak of himself when prophesying, but is guided by the Holy Spirit ([2 Peter 1:21](#)), Caiaphas must have spoken by the Holy Spirit, and therefore the Holy Spirit was with him. Yet who would claim that Caiaphas was saved?

It should be manifest, then, that God can provide the Holy Spirit to a person, even if not saved, to fulfill His purposes. Since God desired for Peter and the other disciples to understand that Gentiles were to hear the Word of life, God poured out His Spirit onto Cornelius and his men to be a sign for Peter, and Peter then understood and had divine testimony to prove it to others ([Acts 10:44-47](#), [Acts 11:15-18](#)).

In reality, the fact that Peter's immediate response was to baptize Cornelius and his men after God poured out His Spirit onto them indicates the importance and need for baptism ([Acts 10:47](#)). Cornelius and his men, in truth, show that we do require immersion in water!

**Argument:** Baptism in water was only under John the Baptist, and was for repentance; Christ's baptism is "with fire."

**Answer:** This argument attempts to make a firm distinction between the natures of the baptisms of John and Jesus ([Luke 3:16](#), [Acts 1:5](#)). This argument would perhaps have merit if it were not for Paul's discussion with some of John's disciples in [Acts 19:1-6](#):

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?"

And they said unto him, "Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given."

And he said, "Into what then were ye baptized?"

And they said, "Into John's baptism."

And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying

unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Jesus.”

And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

We can see, then, that the issue was not the nature of the baptism but the purpose of the baptism. John’s baptism was for repentance; the baptism in the name of Christ is for the remission of sin through His blood. We see that the disciples of John were baptized again, this time in the name of Jesus, and then they had hands laid on them and received the Spirit. There is no reason, then, to allege that Christ’s baptism is not in water.

**Argument:** [1 Corinthians 1:14-17](#) shows that baptism is not valid for today: Paul did not baptize, and Paul said to imitate him as he imitated Christ.

**Answer:** We can see here a classic example of inferring an answer despite the fact that one has been given. Let us consider [1 Corinthians 1:14-17](#):

I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void.

It would be rather odd to try to argue here that Paul does not value baptism, considering that he confesses that he baptized no fewer than three persons in Corinth. The reason for his hesitance in baptizing people is found in verse fifteen:

...lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name.

Paul had a peculiar problem when preaching to the Gentiles; they had a tendency to worship a man with supernatural powers as a god. Consider what occurred in Lystra in [Acts 14:11-18](#):

And when the multitude saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.”

And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Jupiter whose temple was before the city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the multitudes. But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude, crying out and saying,

“Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and bring you good tidings, that ye should turn from these vain

things unto a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet He left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness." And with these sayings scarce restrained they the multitudes from doing sacrifice unto them.

We can see, then, that Paul has previously been elevated beyond his position. Even in Corinth, there was division over to whom people owed their allegiance: to Apollos, Cephas, Paul, and/or Christ ([1 Corinthians 1:12](#)). Paul did not wish to baptize the Corinthians so that no one would think that there was any power in Paul, since the power was in Christ. Paul asked the Corinthians in verse 13, just before the discussion of baptism, the following:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?

The difficulty, then, is not that the Corinthians were baptized or not baptized, or that Paul was to baptize or not to baptize, but the attitudes of the Corinthians and their tendency to exalt the men who worked with them. The fact that so many Corinthians were said to be baptized confirms the need for all to be baptized.

**Argument:** The thief on the cross was saved, and he was not baptized.

**Answer:** The thief on the cross died with a special promise from Jesus:

But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Dost thou not even 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, "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." And he said unto him, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise,"([Luke 23:40-43](#)).

Christ had not yet died, nor was raised; the work of salvation had not yet been completed (cf. [Psalm 22](#), [Isaiah 53](#)). The thief died under the old covenant with a personal guarantee from Christ, realities that are not present for us today. We could say in response, "If Christ comes down and says to you that He will see you in Paradise today, then good, you do not need to be baptized. Otherwise, the need for baptism still stands."

**Retort:** The thief died after Christ did.

**Answer:** While it is probably true that the thief outlasted Jesus, the full redemptive work (let alone the inauguration of the Kingdom) required the resurrection, and it is certain that the thief was dead by then. As it is written:

After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him ([Hosea 6:2](#)).

Likewise, Paul establishes that if the resurrection is not true, then our faith in Christ is in vain, and we are still in our sins ([1 Corinthians 15:12-18](#)). The resurrection, therefore, is as important as the cross in our salvation, and no change in covenant occurred before that point.

**Argument:** [Romans 10:9-10](#) says that belief and confession save. Belief and confession, then, and not baptism, save.

**Answer:** [Romans 10:9-10](#) does indeed say that belief and confession are necessary:

Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

As good students of God's Word ([2 Timothy 2:15](#)), we must always remember that the sum of God's Word is truth ([Psalm 119:160](#)), and we should not introduce contradiction into the text. Note that Paul does not say here that belief and confession "alone" save. Consider [Luke 13:5](#):

I tell you, "Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Would we say that this verse denies the need for belief and confession, because it only mentions repentance? By no means! We learn that belief and confession are necessary for salvation in [Romans 10:9-10](#) and repentance is necessary for salvation in [Luke 13:5](#) and [Acts 2:38](#). If [Acts 2:38](#), [Romans 6:3-7](#), and [1 Peter 3:21](#) affirm the need for baptism to be saved, we recognize that all of these aspects, not just one or two, are necessary. Therefore, the absence of the term "baptism" in [Romans 10:9-10](#) does not negate the need for baptism.

It should be noted that this same type of argument will also use belief from [Acts 16:31](#) or another passage, and one can respond in a similar way as above.

**Argument:** Jesus did not baptize anyone; therefore, why don't we follow His example?

**Answer:** As seen from [John 4:1-2](#) above, the disciples did baptize people as disciples of Christ with Christ present.

If Christ disapproved of this example, would He not have stopped it then? This is actually a confirmation of the need for baptism: Christ used Himself as an example for baptism and people were baptized in His name with His approval while present on the earth.

**Argument:** Baptism requires a baptizer. If you make baptism a requirement for salvation, you also require a baptizer, adding someone to the salvation that comes through Christ alone.

**Answer:** First of all, we should note that the term "baptizer" is foreign to the New Testament after discussion of John the Baptist. The focus is never on the baptizer, but that one is baptized.

Nevertheless, the foundation of this argument (the idea that needing a baptizer adds a person to salvation) is undermined by [Romans 10:14](#):

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Every group recognizes the need for belief, and Paul says that belief can come only when one “hears” the Word of God. Is Paul “adding” someone to the salvation that comes through Christ alone by positing that someone must preach the Word? Throughout the Bible God has chosen humans to communicate His message to their fellow man. If the Word is spread through the preaching of men, then there is no problem with men baptizing others so that they can be saved.

**Argument:** Well, if baptism is what gives remission of sins, wouldn’t you need to be baptized every time you sin?

**Answer:** Baptism is a one-time act that transforms the individual into a new creature, described as being “born again of the water” in [John 3:4](#). After being born again, we must confess our sins, and by doing so, we are forgiven, as John says in [1 John 1:9](#):

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Scriptures do not require continual baptism for remission of continual sin.

**Argument:** What if an airplane crashes into the desert, and a Christian on that plane converts everyone but cannot baptize them, and they all die without water. Are they saved?

**Answer:** This is one of many kinds of such arguments: it may involve different details, but the idea is the same: a person is hindered from being baptized and dies.

All of these arguments are really *argumenta ad absurdum*. They posit unlikely situations, and are really self-defeating. One could simply change some of the details and return the argument, using belief, repentance, or something else of the sort. “Well, what if someone is hearing the Gospel, sees that Christ is Lord and that He died for his sins, but just before he could repent, he is struck by lightning and dies. Is he saved?”

The answer, invariably, is, “God will decide.” If that is true in the circumstance of one before repentance, so it is with the one before baptism. God said that we should be baptized for remission of sins, and that is the rule. We are to preach the rule, not dwell on some ludicrous exceptions. After all, it is likely that the one with whom you speak is near plenty of water, and the only hindrance would be a lack of faith or understanding in his or her need to be immersed in water for the remission of their sin.