

# Mod 8 — SAVED BY GRACE, SAVED IN BAPTISM

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We are now ready to explain how baptism and grace are related. First, I will state several basic principles to keep in mind when studying baptism. (A) Every doctrine, including baptism, is based on Scripture first, not on experience. (B) We cannot draw our conclusions about the meaning of baptism from non-Biblical sources, such as the Latin word *sacramentum* (which often meant “oath, pledge, covenant”). (C) Christian baptism began on the Day of Pentecost. Thus we must not try to base our understanding of it on pre-Pentecostal practices, such as OT circumcision or John’s baptism. (D) There is only ONE BAPTISM, says Ephesians 4:5. Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism both apply to Christians, but they are not two separate events. They are the spiritual and the physical sides of a single baptismal event.

Finally, (E) Salvation as such is conditional, i.e., we receive salvation by meeting certain conditions. However, there are different KINDS of conditions. The main condition is faith, which is the sole MEANS (instrument, vehicle) by which the double cure of salvation is received: “By grace you have been saved *through faith*” (Eph. 2:8). Baptism, on the other hand, is not just another condition for salvation, but another KIND of condition. Specifically, it is the TIME or occasion when God has said he will bestow grace upon the sinner; it is not the means of receiving salvation in the sense that faith is. Both faith and baptism are conditions for salvation, but faith is the means and baptism is the time. Please take care: do not equate condition with means, and do not confuse means and time.

Now we will briefly explore five basic NT texts that explain the meaning of baptism. For a fuller discussion of these and seven other such texts, see my book, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (College Press, 2 ed., 2006).

ONE. MATTHEW 28:19-20. Four actions are specified in this Great Commission. The one main command is “Make disciples,” an action that is preceded by the aorist (past) participle, “having gone.” The means of making disciples is explained in two present participles: “baptizing them,” and “teaching them.” This activity began about ten days after this, on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42).

It is very important that Jesus has separated baptism from teaching. Baptism is set apart because it is one of the conditions for *becoming* a Christian, along with the conditions of faith, repentance, and confession. Baptism alone is mentioned here, because it is the only one of these four things that those carrying out the Great Commission (apostles, evangelists) can do; the others are done by the converts. The doing of these things constitutes what the Bible calls obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). Then follows the second part of making disciples, i.e., teaching them to obey all that has been commanded. This refers to what Paul calls “works of law” (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16), or the “good works” of obedience to one’s

law code, or living the Christian life. Many think baptism belongs in this second category, but Jesus has clearly set it apart from this one.

In his instruction to baptize, Jesus specifically says that sinners are to be baptized “into the name [*eis to onoma*] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This tells us much about the meaning of baptism. The phrase “into the name of” in Greek culture was a technical business term used to indicate the entry of a sum of money or a piece of property into the account bearing the name of its owner. As Jesus uses it here, he means that this act of baptism is the time when one enters into an *ownership relation* with the persons of the Trinity. Here we become God’s property, or slave (see Romans 6:15-23). From this point on we are seeking to fulfill our debt of obedience to our law code.

TWO. ACTS 2:38. This next text is set in the context of the beginning of the church, of the church age, of the New Covenant era. Peter has just preached the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:14-36), and his Jewish audience has come under deep conviction and is asking how to be set free from the guilt of their sin (2:37), which indicates that they had begun to believe the gospel. Peter instructs them to do two things: repent and be baptized. This audience would know what repentance is; this was a main part of the message of the OT prophets. They would also be familiar with a kind of baptism, given the ministry of John the Baptist. This baptism which Peter commands, however, was something new. Some in the audience had no doubt been baptized by John, but Peter said “each of you” must now receive Christian baptism. John’s baptism was not enough (see Acts 19:1-7).

What did Peter say will be the result of this new baptism? Two things, corresponding to the double cure of grace. One is forgiveness of sins, which is the same as justification, or hearing God the Judge declare, “No penalty for you!” The second is the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the new way the Holy Spirit is present within believers, the way John and Jesus called being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). “Baptism in the Spirit” does NOT refer to the gift of tongues (Acts 2:1ff.); it is equivalent to what the Bible calls the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9-11), which is the source of the event called regeneration and of the ongoing process called sanctification.

In this text repentance and baptism cannot be separated; they are equal conditions for receiving the double cure of grace. Also, forgiveness and the indwelling of the Spirit cannot be separated. They are the two-fold essence of the saving grace received in baptism.

THREE. ROMANS 6:1-6. The context of this text also is very important. In Romans 1-5 Paul has just explained the BEST thing that has ever happened to us as Christians: we have been justified by faith in the redemptive works of Jesus, rather than by how well we have been able to respond to the commands of our law code (Rom. 3:28). This is part one of the double cure. Now, in Romans 6:1ff., the Apostle is explaining the SECOND best thing that has happened to us, namely, the second part of the double cure: we have undergone an inward spiritual change so radical that it can be described as no less than a death and a resurrection to new life. Why is this latter change so wonderful? Because it makes it possible for us to live a holy life, i.e., to obey all that Jesus has commanded us (Matt. 28:20)!

So how does Paul bring baptism into the discussion? He gently chastises the Romans for their ignorance of these important events: “Don’t you know what happened to you when you were baptized?” he asks (v. 3). In his explanation, he declares that one is *baptized into Christ*, i.e., into a union with Christ in his role as Redeemer. Specifically, one is *baptized into His death*, i.e., *we have been buried with Him through baptism into death*; and we are likewise united with him in his resurrection. This experience of salvation is unequivocally a result of being baptized.

Let us not yield to the temptation to blur the saving significance of baptism so clearly stated here. Note: Paul does not say we *repented* into Christ. He does not say we were buried with him through *faith* into death. The reference is to baptism. And let us not insult God by ignoring Ephesians 4:5 and saying (as one of my Calvinist professors at Westminster Seminary said), “There’s not a drop of water in Romans six!” That goes for the next text as well.

FOUR. COLOSSIANS 2:11-13. This text is similar to Romans 6 in that it speaks of the spiritual change in our hearts as being comparable to a death and a resurrection, a change made possible by our coming into union with Jesus Christ. Here Paul says that in that moment we were “buried with Him” and “also raised up with Him.” “He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions”! But exactly when did this wonderful “regeneration and renewing” (see Titus 3:5) take place? Here Paul says it more clearly than anywhere else in the NT. He says it happens “IN BAPTISM,” also adding the relative pronoun phrase, “IN WHICH.”

It is significant that in this same verse (v. 12) Paul uses both the phrase “in baptism” and the phrase “through faith.” We are buried and raised with him *in baptism*, but at the same time it is *through faith*. There is no paradox, no contradiction here. Baptism as the TIME of salvation is perfectly consistent with faith as the MEANS of receiving that salvation.

FIVE. 1 PETER 3:20-21. It is appropriate to close this brief study with Peter’s statement that, just as the water of The Flood saved Noah’s family by floating the ark, so also “baptism now saves you.” Let us be clear: the water of The Flood is the symbolic analogy; baptism is the REALITY. Peter does not say baptism is “symbolizing” anything. Rather, baptism is DOING something: it SAVES.

Peter does make it clear that this salvation is not being accomplished through the physical effects of the water, but through the sinner’s appeal or prayer to God for a good conscience. This is an indication of the sinner’s faith and repentance, in answer to which God bestows forgiveness and clears the sinner’s slate (paid in full). But Peter goes even further to make it clear that the salvation given in baptism is not based on anything the sinner does. It happens only through the power of the redemptive work—the resurrection, in this case—of Jesus Christ.

These and other texts show that the Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by grace, but saved in baptism.