

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate your study of baptism in the Book of Acts. This is a supplement to the sermon and is based on my study and meditation of the relevant verses.

STUDY NOTES

[Act 2:37-41 ESV] 37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41 So those who received his word were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

—Repentance and baptism closely relate to one another. Why? Baptism expresses repentance.

- Throughout Acts, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin.
- Observe, for instance, Act 20:21: "...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."
- Thus, baptism expresses not just repentance but also faith.

—Heralds of the gospel throughout Acts call people to conversion, using any combination of these three words: faith, repentance, and baptism.

- Here are some definitions:
 - Faith is confidence in God's goodness, wisdom, or power.
 - Repentance is a change of mind—about God and our sin.
 - Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace received in salvation. In short, it is the sacrament associated with conversion.
- The close link between faith, repentance, and baptism throughout Acts means we should likewise closely associate these words.
 - Faith and repentance should thus not precede baptism by months and years (as is the case with long-delayed adult baptisms).¹
 - Baptism should thus not precede faith and repentance by months and years (as is the case with infant baptism).
 - When we call others to conversion, we should as readily call them to be baptized as to believe and repent.
- Despite their close association, we must not muddle their meaning. Throughout Acts, faith and repentance take pride of place. God justifies the sinner based on His inward work of grace in the heart—not on getting wet. Baptism consummates conversion, but faith and repentance (conversion of the heart) initiate the conversion process. A truly converted heart desires the sacrament of conversion—baptism—not to effect salvation but to magnify it.
- Evidence within this passage that faith/repentance takes pride of place is in the final expression: "So those who received his word were baptized...."
 - This expression appears in 8:14 to describe how the Samaritans "received the word of God" and in 11:1 to describe how Gentiles "received the word of God." In both cases, "received the word of God" means they believed it.
 - In 17:11-12, the Jews of Thessalonica "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed..."—here, "received the word of God" is not 100% identical to believing since "many" but not all believed.

¹ I am speaking in generalities; exceptional circumstances can be imagined. One exception is the baptism of children. My children were probably saved for several years before I baptized them, but I waited long enough to ensure that (1) I could see tangible fruit of faith/repentance in their lives, which is harder to discern in kids, (2) they would remember being baptized when they grew older, and (3) they weren't doing this for me but for God.

- In Act 2:41, “received the word of God” must equate to genuine faith since all who received the word were also baptized. Thus, it is still appropriate to say that faith and repentance take pride of place, for the apostles required baptismal candidates to have received the word of God before baptizing them. There is nothing magical about baptismal waters. It consummates conversion—without equating to conversion or causing one to be saved.

—“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ”:

- Peter says this in response to “What shall we do?”
- Of the three words associated with conversion—faith, repentance, and baptism—why does Peter highlight the last two?
 - These people were not just run-of-the-mill sinners (is there such a thing?); Peter holds them personally accountable for the blood of Jesus (2:36: “...this Jesus whom YOU crucified”).
 - In light of this, it makes sense that Peter calls them to repentance (an inward work of the heart) and baptism (the outward expression of it). Those who publicly disowned Jesus must publicly confess Him as Lord.
 - Such a public confession, of course, presupposes faith also.
- “repent”: John’s baptism was a “baptism of repentance” (Lk. 3:3; Act 13:24; 19:4), but this foreshadowed Christian baptism. Christian baptism also links closely to repentance, as we have seen. It signifies our death to self and new life in Christ.
- “be baptized”:
 - Dr. Eckhard Schnabel translates “be baptized” as “be immersed.” Implicitly, we should baptize by immersion.
 - Schnabel also comments on the passive voice—“be baptized”—rather than the active voice—“baptize yourselves.” It would have been customary for Jews to baptize themselves ritually and regularly to remain “clean.” Christian baptism maintains the meaning of “cleansing,” but it is performed by another person rather than by oneself. Why does this matter? Because Christian baptism requires connection to the Christian church. Membership and baptism link arms. More on that later when we discuss baptism in the Spirit.
- “in the name of Jesus Christ”:
 - Oneness Pentecostals insist that we must not baptize using the Trinitarian formula from Matt. 28:19 (“baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”), but only in Jesus’ name.
 - Acts depicts baptism only in the name of Jesus (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5) but for different reasons than what Oneness Pentecostals claim.
 - Oneness Pentecostals baptize only in Jesus’ name because they affirm the Trinitarian heresy of “modalism,” which teaches that God has different “modes” or “manifestations”—much like water can manifest as a solid, liquid, or gas. But Acts cannot be teaching that God changes modes or forms like water. Acts everywhere affirms (along with the whole New Testament) that the Father, Son, and Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal Persons within the one Godhead.
 - When Acts depicts baptism “in the name of Jesus,” Luke does not cancel the Trinitarian formula commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19. Rather, he emphasizes that Jesus is the ascended Lord who continues to work through the church that ministers in His name (Acts 1:1). In other words, it’s the point of the whole book. Jesus is still working. But let us not forget—Jesus does not work independently of other Persons of the Godhead. Instead, He sits at the Father’s right hand and works by the agency of the Spirit. Consider the Trinitarian shape of Acts 2:33 (a very hard one for modalists to explain!): *“Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he (Jesus) has poured out this (the Spirit) that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”*
 - One more critical element of baptism in Jesus’ name is what Dr. Schnabel writes. Those going under the water “acknowledge that immersion for cleansing from impurity is now

fundamentally connected with the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah." In other words, we no longer "cleanse" ourselves through Jewish ritual cleansings; now, Jesus makes us clean so we can worship Him with a clean conscience in His temple—the church. Baptism signifies this reality.

- "for the forgiveness of your sins":
 - Some people believe that to be truly saved, you must be baptized, and they base it on verses like this. This verse seems to portray a causal link between being baptized and—as a result—being forgiven.
 - I have already argued above that faith and repentance take pride of place in our conversion story, for it is the work of God in our heart that saves us. Acts 10:44-48 (see comments below) and 11:15-18 make this crystal clear—both portray faith, repentance, and salvation as occurring *before* baptism. The same is implied in 2:41 (see comments above).
 - A cross-reference with 1 Cor. 1:14-17 clarifies even more that baptism does not cause God to forgive us. Paul writes, *"14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. 16 (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."*
 - If baptism saved people like faith/repentance do, it is unthinkable that Paul would say he's glad he baptized few people in Corinth. Paul distinguishes between preaching the gospel and baptizing people. They are not the same.
 - Nevertheless, God meets us in the water. Baptism is a means of grace through which we position ourselves to receive from God. Furthermore, it consummates conversion and should always be performed in close proximity to it.
 - So in what sense is baptism "for the forgiveness of sins"?
 - It seems to me that many Christians dodge the force of this question by claiming, for instance, that "for the forgiveness of sins" means "because you were already forgiven." I believe it's true that they were already forgiven when they "received the word" (2:41), but just because it's true doesn't mean it's what Peter intended to communicate.
 - When Peter commands the people to be baptized "for the forgiveness of sins", we should not interpret this in a wooden manner. The flexibility of speech in this scenario occurs in every language. It's called a "synecdoche," (grammar nerds: synecdoche is a subset of metonymy, which itself is a subset of metaphor) which means "part for the whole." For instance, if someone says, "King David went up against the Philistines," we don't mean that David went alone. We chose part of Israel's army—David—to speak for the whole. In the same way, Scripture can talk about "faith" or "repentance" or "baptism" using language that applies to salvation even though salvation technically occurs at the moment faith awakens in the heart. This is synecdoche. It uses part of the process of turning to Christ—whether faith or repentance or baptism—to speak for the whole, thus associating it with salvation. It does this even though faith more technically saves us.
 - Therefore, when Peter says, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins," he just as well could have said, "Be converted for the forgiveness of sins," or "Put your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins." Authors of Scripture considered faith, repentance, and baptism as so closely intertwined that they did not always separate them over technical differences. Instead, they used conversion language flexibly since they all occurred proximally as part of a unified process.
 - In conclusion, "repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins," is no different than saying, "come to Jesus and find forgiveness."
- "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit":
 - Normally, the gift of the Holy Spirit (aka the baptism of the Holy Spirit) is received when faith awakens in the heart rather than being delayed till after baptism in water. See Acts

- 10:44-48 and 11:15-18. I recognize that there is diverse data to sort through, which I did on 10/2/23 in the Study Guide. Download online: "The Baptism vs. Filling of the Holy Spirit."
- Baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit closely relate both in timing (at conversion) and terminology (both use the word "baptism"). This should cause us to inquire about the relationship between these two baptisms.
 - Both baptism in water and in the Spirit signify our identification with Christ's new temple—His church.
 - BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT SIGNIFIES IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CHURCH. When Jesus baptizes the 120 in the Spirit on Pentecost each of the four signs—wind in the house (2:2), fiery tongues (2:3), Spirit-filled believers (2:4), new languages (2:4)—signifies the formation of God's new temple, which is the church. (See sermon on 10/9/22.) Furthermore, Paul explains baptism in the Spirit as the act by which Jesus unites us to His body (which occurs at conversion): "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).
 - BAPTISM IN WATER SIGNIFIES IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CHURCH. In the book of Acts, every story of water baptism closely associates with Spirit baptism. Since Spirit baptism identifies us with the church, water baptism probably does also. This purpose is confirmed in Acts 2. Consider the flow of Acts 2:41 ("those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls") into 2:42 ("And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers"). Baptized people are "added" to the church, where they devote themselves to Jesus and each other. Luke thus leverages this prototype in Jerusalem to teach us how baptism in water identifies us with the church.
 - We should not baptize people who plan to avoid joining a local church. This would violate the meaning of baptism.

[Act 8:9-17 ESV] *9 But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. 10 They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great." 11 And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being **baptized** he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. 14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been **baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*

—The pattern here and throughout Acts is "they believed... [and then] they were baptized" (8:12). No clear statement reveals infant baptism. Instead, people make credible professions of faith and are baptized immediately.

—"Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip."

- There is fair debate over whether Simon was truly saved. I made the case in the Study Guide on chapter 8 that Simon was probably saved. Here is what I wrote:
 - Verse 9 indicates that Simon stopped practicing magic after believing and being baptized. This suggests genuine repentance.
 - The same formula—"believed... baptized" describes Simon and the city in back-to-back verses. There is no indication here that Philip baptized prematurely or that Simon's faith differed from everybody else's.
 - The statement that "even Simon himself believed" suggests his belief was of the same fabric as everyone else's. If Simon's faith was spurious, we might have expected him to say, "Simon claimed to believe, but..."
 - "believed" can be translated "came to faith" if the tense of the verb is interpreted as an ingressive aorist (Schnabel).

- Simon “continued (Gk. *proskartereo*) with Philip,” suggesting he followed Philip in discipleship. This same word is used of real disciples in Acts 2:42, 46, and 6:4 to highlight their extreme devotion and faithfulness. Luke seems to add this phrase to suggest, “his faith was real because he had follow-through...”
 - The city had been amazed (Gk. *existemi*) by Simon’s miracles (8:9, 11), but now Simon is amazed (Gk. *existemi*) by Philip’s (8:13). Luke seems to use this word to communicate that the tables have turned. The one who once amazed others was now himself amazed. The former amazement was attached to faith in Simon as a great wonder worker. It seems likely that the latter amazement is linked to faith also (in Jesus working through Philip).
 - On that note, Luke points out how Simon’s amazement came after “seeing signs and great miracles performed.” This is no different from the rest of the Samaritans who “heard and saw the signs” Philip performed (8:6). In other words, we observe the same sequence: see, hear, believe, get baptized. Since the rest of the Samaritans’ conversions were genuine (8:8; cf. 13:52 and 8:14; cf. 11:1; 17:11), it suggests that Simon’s was true also.
 - I might be wrong, however. Simon displays terrible wickedness shortly after conversion (8:18-23). Either way, I find something remarkable: God does not censure Philip for prematurely baptizing Simon. The story of Simon instructs us not to make disciples “prove themselves” over long periods before baptizing them. Baptism is associated with conversion. After someone makes a credible profession of faith, we should baptize them. Just like God does not discipline Philip for misjudging Simon, neither will He discipline us for baptizing people quickly based on credible professions.
- The baptism of the Spirit is withheld until after the apostles arrive and lay hands on the Samaritans. I explain why in the Study Guide to Acts 8:9-25. Download online.

[Act 8:36-40 ESV] 36 *And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being **baptized**?"* 37 *And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he **baptized** him.* 39 *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.* 40 *But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.*

—In the flow of this narrative, Jesus (through Philip) leads the eunuch from a desert to a pool, reminding us of passages like Isaiah 32 and 35, where the Spirit is poured out from on high and the Messiah turns deserts into pools. Considering these allusions, we should not suppose baptismal waters are dry of spiritual power. The water is not magic—apart from faith baptism means nothing—but it is also not a bare symbol. Instead, baptism, like communion, is a means of grace. God meets us in the water. We who have received the grace of new birth subsequently enter the water as an objective, shared, robust assurance of this reality.

—You will notice that verse 37 is missing, even though the number 37 is preserved. This is because some manuscripts add all or most of verse 37: “And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he replied, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

—Most scholars consider verse 37 a later addition, probably rooted in someone’s discomfort with the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, baptized without making a profession of faith. On the one hand, this offers insight into the early church’s view—that faith was a precursor to baptism. Despite what some say, a strong case can be made that infant baptism was not normative until later in church history. The earliest church fathers seemed to expect a profession of faith. Tertullian (3rd century) argued against baptizing babies,² which means it could not have been a universal practice.

—On the other hand—and more to the point of Acts 8—Luke does not record the eunuch’s profession of faith, but he implies it by the request to be baptized. Clearly, the eunuch received Philip’s message, professed Christ, and repented of his sins before requesting baptism.

—“What prevents me from being baptized?”

- True faith desires prompt baptism.

² *De baptismo* 18, probably from around the year 200, Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism, ed. E. Evans (London: SPCK, 1964): 36-41, commentary in 101-106. Cf. ANF 3:677-678; PL 1:1220-22; CCL 1:292-293.

- The eunuch asks, “what prevents me” and Peter asks “can we withhold water”? Luke is driving home the point: don’t prevent baptism; don’t make it hard; don’t insert hoops to jump through; don’t wait till they’ve proven themselves for months and years.

—“they both went down into the water”: some argue that this did not necessarily entail “immersion” in the water, but this is special pleading. Why go all the way down into the water if you intend merely to sprinkle or pour?

— The Spirit does not carry Philip away before he baptizes the eunuch. Preaching the gospel and leading the man to Christ did not complete Philip’s mission. Likewise, our mission is incomplete if we make converts without baptizing them. Again, baptism is not an optional addendum to conversion. It is a mandated component of conversion. We are saved by faith alone, but true faith quickly goes down in the water. At least, that’s the biblical model.

[Act 9:17-19 ESV] 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was **baptized**; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

—We know from 9:9, that Saul was baptized three days after conversion. This is the longest delay in Acts between believing and being baptized.

—Luke tells the story of Saul’s conversion in a way that mirrors Christ’s resurrection. I wrote in the Study Guide in that section: “Like Jesus, Saul dwells in darkness for three days; like Jesus, Saul sees the light after three days; like Jesus, Saul emerges to announce the good news. Luke employs this imagery to teach us about conversion. Conversion is not just reform. It is not turning over a new leaf. Conversion is death and resurrection. Luke reinforces this by tying Saul’s baptism (going under the water = death; coming out = resurrection) to his emergence from darkness into the light.”

—Christian baptism identifies us with Christ’s death and resurrection. Saul, who uniquely experienced this, universalizes the principle for all of us in Romans 6:

- [Rom 6:1-5 ESV] 1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized** into Christ Jesus were **baptized** into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by **baptism** into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- Like other apostles, Paul says of baptism what we might say of faith and repentance—that it unites us with Christ. But, again, since faith, repentance, and baptism are so intertwined, apostles could use any of them to speak for all of them.
- Baptism reveals our identification with Christ’s death and resurrection in two different ways in Romans 6: first, we mirror Christ’s death and resurrection by dying to sin and rising to walk in newness of life; second, we reflect Christ’s death and resurrection by literally dying and rising again on the last day.

[Act 10:44-48 ESV] 44 While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. 45 And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 47 “Can anyone withhold water for **baptizing** these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 And he commanded them to be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

—The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his household “while Peter was still saying these things” (10:44). This means they believed—and were saved—upon the moment faith entered their heart. Luke presents the story of Cornelius as normative for the Christian life.

—Again, belief is immediately followed by baptism.

—Again, baptism in water is closely associated with baptism in the Spirit.

[Act 16:14-15 ESV] 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. 15 And

after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

—Immediately after Lydia believes, she is baptized.

—This introduces a new wrinkle in the story, however: "her household" was also baptized. Some argue that this might have included infants. There are significant problems with this view, however. If God wanted the church to baptize infants—a crucial religious practice—why would zero unambiguous texts teach such? Not one command in the New Testament says, or even suggests, "baptize babies." Furthermore, not one story in the Bible describes an infant baptism. If baptizing babies is so important to God, why would He say nothing about it? At this point, people fall back on arguments from silence (like here, in Acts 16) or church history. In a way, this comes down to how we understand God: does God demand obedience in areas that He is silent about in His word? I say no. If God requires it, He communicates it—through Scripture. I'll discuss the "household" argument further in the following verses.

[Act 16:30-33 ESV] 30 Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was **baptized** at once, he and all his family.

—Verses 31-32 clarify the household baptisms. These are not infants who lived in Lydia's or the jailer's home. Instead, Saul's missionary strategy is to preach the gospel to every household member. This is why he says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your whole household." Paul is appealing to individuals capable of consciously believing. Verse 32 adds that he "spoke the word of the Lord... to all who were in his house." Was he preaching to babies? Was he trying to persuade the infant son of Cornelius? No. He was preaching the gospel to those who understood and could consciously choose Jesus. —"baptized at once": Acts again prioritizes prompt baptism.

[Act 18:8 ESV] 8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were **baptized**.

—As with Lydia and the jailer, the "household" of Crispus "believed" before being "baptized." Saul does not sprinkle babies. People are old enough to profess faith in Jesus.

—My Lutheran friend, Dr. Jordan Cooper, argues that John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from the womb (Luke 1), and therefore babies can believe. Even if we grant that possibility, we would rarely if ever be able to discern the presence of faith. We have no record in Scripture of baptizing people whose faith we cannot observe.

—Proponents of infant baptism typically argue that the family's faith "stands in" for the baby that can't yet believe. They base this on the Old Testament background of circumcising babies, but this misunderstands the new covenant. Under the old covenant, the law was external, written on tablets of stone; under the new covenant, the law is internal, written on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3). Therefore, only true believers comprise the new covenant community. In contrast, the old covenant community contained many unbelievers who had an external conformity to the law, but their hearts were uncircumcised. To baptize babies is to confuse the covenants. Circumcision was appointed for (yet) unbelieving babies in an era when the law was external. Baptism is intended for believers in an age where the law is internal.

[Act 19:1-7 ESV] 1 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 And he said, "Into what then were you **baptized**?" They said, "Into John's baptism." 4 And Paul said, "John **baptized** with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were **baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

—This is not a story about "rebaptism," for they had never been baptized as Christians. John's baptism was a precursor, not a replacement for Christian baptism.

—Saul at first assumed these Ephesian disciples of John had been saved, but then he learns they knew nothing of the Holy Spirit or, apparently, Jesus (19:1-4).

—In keeping with the pattern in Acts, Paul baptizes them immediately after conversion.

—The baptism in water is again closely linked with the baptism in the Spirit. As we have said, both are associated with conversion and incorporation into the body of Christ.

[Act 22:12-16 ESV] 12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, 13 came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. 14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; 15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be **baptized** and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

—"And now why do you wait?": Once again, Luke emphasizes prompt baptism. God's question to all who believe but have not yet been baptized remains the same: *why do you wait?*

—Baptism is associated here with washing away our sins. I won't rehash the argument I have made above about faith, repentance, and baptism being used flexibly, with the former two taking pride of place in our conversion narrative. Instead, based on the arguments above, I will assert that baptism does not "ex opere operato"³ wash away sins as if the water itself saves us. Rather, baptism in water—when associated with faith and repentance—signifies the washing away of sin that God performs when He awakens our hearts to believe.

—Importantly, Peter reminds the Jerusalem council of God's ministry to the Gentiles—that God "cleansed their hearts by faith" (15:9). Neither he nor the council ever mentions baptism in association with this cleansing. This is not because baptism is unimportant but because the council's purpose was to determine the requirements for Gentile inclusion. It is unthinkable that—if baptism had been necessary for eternal salvation—the council failed to mention it entirely and instead emphasized faith alone for cleansing from sin.

—Schnabel: "The metaphor of 'washing away' connects with the reference to immersion, for in Jewish culture, immersion in water symbolized the cleansing from sins."

—Ananias calls him "Brother Saul," and he receives his sight, which symbolizes his newfound faith in Jesus. The passage emphasizes that Saul already had faith (and salvation) before being baptized.

—"calling on his name":

- Baptism is to be practiced in conjunction with faith, which Luke indicates by the expression "calling on his name."
- This phrase appears throughout Acts about our prayer life, but it derives from Joel 2, which Peter quotes in Acts 2: "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So again, baptism is associated with salvation, but it is technically the faith that precedes baptism that saves and washes us clean (cf. Act 15:9).
- It is possible to think of "calling on the name of the Lord" as something Saul did during the act of baptism; it is also possible to think of baptism as a form of calling on the name of the Lord—as if baptism itself appeals to God.

Baptism in Acts: Q&A⁴

- I. What is baptism?
 - a. Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace received in salvation.
 - i. Baptism signifies that the *instrumental cause*⁵ of salvation—faith—is present.
 - ii. Baptism signifies the *essence* of salvation (elaborated on in the epistles): death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4), deliverance from judgment and the devil (1 Pet. 3:18-22), forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Act 2:38; 22:16; Heb. 6:2; 1 Pet. 3:21) and being clothed with Christ's transformation (Gal. 3:27).
 - b. Heralds of the gospel throughout Acts call people to conversion, using any combination of these three words: faith, repentance, and baptism.
 - i. Act 2:38: "And Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

³ The Roman Catholic Church employs this Latin phrase to depict the efficacy of the sacraments for achieving salvation, simply by performing the ritual. It means, "by the work worked." Protestants, in contrast, emphasize that sacramental elements (water, bread, wine) do not confer salvation, nor do they mediate grace apart from faith. (Some Protestants do practice infant baptism, but they still emphasize the presence of faith, usually from the family baptizing the baby.)

⁴ This section repeats material from above but formats it differently so you can jump to the questions that interest you.

⁵ The Reformers used the language of "instrumental cause" to depict how faith is the means by which we receive Christ's righteousness—what Paul called, "justification by faith." The instrumental cause contrasts with the "meritorious cause" of salvation, which is Christ's obedience and substitutionary death for sinners. Throughout this handout, faith and repentance are typically treated together, for they occur simultaneously and equate to one's "heart conversion." In terms of logical sequence, however, faith precedes repentance, for we must believe in Christ in order to turn to Him.

- ii. Acts 16:30-31: *"Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"*
- iii. Act 20:21: *"...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance** toward God and of **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- c. The close link between faith, repentance, and baptism throughout Acts means we should likewise closely associate these words.
 - i. Faith and repentance should thus not precede baptism by months and years (as is the case with long-delayed adult baptisms).⁶
 - ii. Baptism should thus not precede faith and repentance by months and years (as is the case with infant baptism).⁷
 - iii. When we call others to conversion, we should as readily call them to be baptized as to believe and repent.

II. Does baptism cause eternal salvation?

- a. Despite their close association, we must not muddle faith, repentance, and baptism. Throughout Acts, faith and repentance take pride of place. God justifies the sinner based on the inward work of grace in the heart—not on getting wet.
 - i. Cornelius' household is saved *before* baptism: ***While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days"*** (Act 10:44-48).
 - ii. The Gentiles were granted ***"repentance that leads life"*** (11:18), for God ***"cleansed their hearts by faith"*** (15:9).
- b. Baptism consummates conversion, but faith and repentance (conversion of the heart) initiate the conversion process. A truly converted heart desires the sacrament of conversion—baptism—not to effect salvation but to magnify it.
- c. Despite their distinctions, faith, repentance, and baptism so closely intertwine that the apostles did not always separate them over technical differences. Instead, they used the terms almost interchangeably, sometimes applying "salvation" language to baptism.
 - i. Acts 2:38: *"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*
 - ii. Acts 22:16: *"And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized and wash away your sins**, calling on his name."*
- d. It is best not to explain these texts away ("What Peter really meant was..."), but rather to explain them as a manner of speech that occurs in every language.
 - i. Every language includes figurative speech such as "synecdoche," which means "part for the whole" (think "boots on the ground" for soldiers or "fifty head" for cattle). Since faith, repentance, and baptism all relate to conversion, the apostles could substitute any one of these for all of them—part for the whole.
 - ii. Therefore, when Peter says, "Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of sins," he intends something like, "Be converted and receive forgiveness," or "Come to Jesus and find forgiveness."

⁶ I am speaking in generalities; exceptional circumstances can be imagined. One exception is the baptism of children. My children were probably saved for several years before I baptized them, but I waited long enough to ensure that (1) I could see tangible fruit of faith/repentance in their lives, which is harder to discern in kids, (2) they would remember being baptized when they grew older, and (3) they weren't doing this for me but for God.

⁷ Some argue that baptism saves the infant and thus it is not disassociated with conversion, but this cannot be true.

- iii. Those who emphasize the need for baptism to be truly saved must explain away verses like Acts 10:44-48 and 15:9. Those who say, "What Peter/Ananias really meant was [insert butchered explanation]" explain away Acts 2:38 and 22:16.
- iv. The best approach explains every text without explaining any of them away.

III. What does baptism do?

- a. Baptism outwardly signifies the inward and spiritual grace of salvation.
- b. Baptism consummates conversion (without equating to it). Historically, this is why baptism has been called a "seal." It "seals the deal," so to speak.
- c. Baptism identifies us with the Triune God.
 - i. Jesus teaches us to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because disciples of Jesus identify themselves with the co-equal and co-eternal Persons of the one Godhead (Matt. 28:19).
 - ii. Acts depicts baptism "in the name of Jesus" (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), but this was not a baptismal formula. Instead, just like the church prayed in Jesus' name (2:21), healed in Jesus' name (4:12), preached in Jesus' name (4:18), and suffered in Jesus' name (5:41), the church also baptized in Jesus' name. This was not a baptismal or liturgical formula but rather a way of doing life. The church did all these things by the power of and for the glory of Jesus (cf. Act 1:1; 4:10).
 - iii. This matters because Oneness Pentecostals baptize only in Jesus' name—refusing to name the Father and the Spirit—using the language in Acts as justification for the heresy of modalism.
 - 1. Modalism teaches that God has different "modes" or "manifestations"—like water that manifests as a solid, liquid, or gas.
 - 2. This contradicts Trinitarian doctrine, where one God exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—who are co-equal and co-eternal.
- d. Baptism identifies us with the church.
 - i. Baptism in the Spirit and baptism in water closely correlate throughout Acts (Act 2:38-41; 8:15-17; 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 19:5-7).
 - ii. Since baptism in the Spirit unites us with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), we should expect similar signification for baptism in water, especially since both are associated with conversion.
 - iii. This purpose is confirmed in Acts 2, where Acts 2:41 ("those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls") flows into 2:42 ("And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers").
 - iv. Baptized people are "added" to the church, where they devote themselves to Jesus and each other. Luke thus leverages this prototype in Jerusalem to teach us how baptism in water identifies us with the church.
 - v. We should not baptize people who plan to avoid joining a local church. This would violate the meaning of baptism.
- e. Baptism is a "means of grace."
 - i. This does not mean that baptism merits eternal salvation (see II). Instead, when accompanied by faith, baptism confers upon recipients the grace that it signifies, empowering God's people to live out the reality to which it points.
 - ii. BW Statement of Faith (#11): *"We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the two ordinances of the church to be observed until the time of Christ's return. They are **not a means of salvation but are sacramental channels of God's sanctifying grace and blessing** to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Only those who have personally and consciously placed their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are qualified to receive the sacraments (Matthew 26:26-29; 28:19; Romans 6:3-11; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 1 Peter 3:21)."*

- iii. Luke conveys this in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Jesus leads from the desert to a pool, reminding us of God's promises to transform—through the Messiah and His Spirit—our deserts into pools (Isa. 32:14-18; 35:1-10).
- iv. Baptismal waters are neither magical nor dry of spiritual power. Instead, they are means of grace where Jesus meets us in the water.

IV. How should Christians be baptized—by sprinkling, pouring (affusion), or immersion?

- a. Dr. Eckhard Schnabel translates the Greek word *baptizo*—which English Bibles transliterate into “baptize”—as “immerse,” arguing that this is the normal meaning.
- b. There are no clear examples of sprinkling or pouring water in the New Testament.
- c. Not every baptism in Acts provides sufficient detail to know how people were baptized but Acts 8:38-39 comes close: “*And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they **both went down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he **baptized** him. 39 And when they **came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.*”
- d. Some argue that Philip did not immerse the eunuch, but this is special pleading.
- e. The *Didache*, which was written around the time of the New Testament, counseled Christians to immerse if possible, but if not possible, to pour: “*Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. After you have spoken all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water. If you do not have running water, baptize in other water. If you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you do not have either, pour out water three times on the head “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Before the baptism the one baptizing and the one being baptized are to fast, and any others who are able. Command the one being baptized to fast beforehand a day or two*” (Didache 7:1-4).
- f. In my judgment, immersion is ideal because the New Testament models it, the Greek word implies it, and the symbolism (death/resurrection, cf. Rom. 6:1-5) suggests it.
- g. I would not “die on the hill” of “mode of baptism,” however. The hill to die on is not so much *how* but *whether* a Christian has been baptized.

V. When should Christians be baptized?

- a. Throughout Acts, we only have examples of people being baptized after making a credible profession of faith.
 - i. Acts 2:41: *So those who **received his word** were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*
 - ii. Acts 8:12: *But when they **believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women.*
 - iii. Acts 10:47: *Can anyone withhold water for **baptizing** these people, who **have received the Holy Spirit** just as we have?*
 - iv. Acts 18:8: *And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul **believed** and were **baptized**.*
- b. Throughout Acts, Luke emphasizes the need for prompt baptism, following a profession of faith.
 - i. Acts 8:36: *And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “**See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?**”*
 - ii. Acts 10:47: ***Can anyone withhold water for baptizing** these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*
 - iii. Acts 16:33: *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was **baptized at once**, he and all his family.*
 - iv. Acts 19:4-5: *And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” **On hearing this, they were baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
 - v. Acts 22:16: *And now **why do you wait? Rise and be baptized** and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*
 - vi. True faith desires prompt baptism. The longest stretch between initial faith and its expression in baptism is three days (9:9, 17-19).

- c. Some argue that we can baptize before a credible profession of faith—in infancy—based (in part) on the household baptisms in Acts, where it is supposed that some in those households **might** have been babies.
 - i. We don't base major theological beliefs and practices on what a text might say.
 - ii. Furthermore, the text shows that these households professed faith:
 - 1. Acts 16:30-32: *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house."*
 - 2. Acts 18:8: *Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.*
 - iii. Luke does not convey that Paul sprinkled babies but rather that his missionary strategy focused on households over individuals. Paul appeals to members of each household who are capable of professing faith (16:32; 18:8).
- d. Some argue that the lesson of Simon the Sorcerer provides a cautionary tale about baptizing people too promptly—before they prove themselves over a long duration.
 - i. I have argued above that Simon was saved. If I am right, then it was right to baptize him.
 - ii. Even if I am wrong, however, the lesson we derive from Simon's story (where he falls into sin after baptism) does not teach us to delay baptism.
 - 1. If Luke intended to teach us to delay baptism, he would not have so frequently illustrated prompt baptisms in Acts.
 - 2. If Luke intended to teach us to delay baptism, he would have censured Philip for baptizing Simon too quickly. Instead, Luke narrates another story of Philip promptly baptizing someone in the next section (8:26-40).
 - iii. Simon's fall into sin teaches the opposite lesson. Rather than delaying baptism on account of a potential "fall" back into sin, we should baptize promptly, knowing that God doesn't hold us responsible for "downriver" disobedience.
- e. Thoughts about baptizing children:
 - i. Young children can have genuine faith (1 Sm. 3; Ps. 8:2; Mt. 21:15-16) and thus can be baptized.
 - ii. While we generally baptize immediately after faith awakens in the heart, there can be wisdom in proceeding judiciously with children. My children were probably saved for several years before I baptized them, but I waited long enough to ensure that (1) I could see tangible fruit of faith/repentance in their lives, which is harder to discern in kids, (2) they would remember being baptized when they grew older, and (3) they weren't doing this for me but for God.
- f. Thoughts about rebaptizing people:
 - i. Scripture emphasizes that there is "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).
 - ii. We have no examples of "rebaptism" in Acts. The men in Acts 19 had only received John's baptism, not Christian baptism.
 - iii. Rebaptism can be appropriate, but we should not rush to be rebaptized every time we turn back to God. Baptized Christians turning back to God should do so through prayer, confession, and participation in the Lord's Supper.
 - iv. Rebaptism is appropriate if someone was baptized before becoming a Christian.
 - 1. *Those baptized in Jesus' name only:* You should get rebaptized because your first "baptism" was into the heretical doctrine of modalism.
 - 2. *Those baptized in infancy:* Infant baptism was practiced throughout history, and many beloved siblings in Christ affirm it. While we teach believers' baptism, we leave up to one's conscience whether to be rebaptized. If you were baptized as an infant, you should not feel condemned. If you feel convicted to get rebaptized, we will baptize you.

3. *Those baptized in childhood:* Those baptized as young children should not be rebaptized if they were truly saved beforehand—even if they “fell away” and came back later. Sometimes the moment of conversion can be hard to pinpoint, however. If you feel certain you were unsaved before baptism, we will rebaptize you. If there is some doubt, we are happy to process it with you.

VI. Where should Christians be baptized?

- a. Acts records thousands of baptisms but only one official church service (Acts 20).
- b. It is permissible to baptize outside of a formal church service, but there is also beauty in celebrating baptism during church (which has been more common in church history).
- c. If you get baptized outside of a church service, we encourage you not to do so outside of church community. Remember, baptism in water correlates to baptism in the Spirit, which unites us to the body of Christ. While the Ethiopian eunuch gets baptized with no witnesses besides Philip, every other baptism appears to have numerous witnesses.
- d. If you get baptized outside of a church service, we encourage you to dialogue with a pastor about it. Sometimes complications arise—such as how to treat one who was baptized in Jesus’ name only—and it is wise to get pastoral counsel.
- e. If you get baptized outside of a church service, consider doing it with a C-group or other members of the church, videotaping it, and sending it to us. We would like to create a montage of baptisms and testimonies to show in a Membership Meeting. We so want to celebrate with you!