

Chapter 6: Re-Baptism, When and Why

For a starting point I would like to summarize what I firmly believe the Bible teaches about Baptism.

A *valid* Baptism is an immersion in water that:

- 1) saves us (1 Pet. 3:21, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38; 22:16, Romans 6:1-4, etc.),
- 2) puts us into Christ (Gal. 3:27), where every spiritual blessing is (Eph. 1:3),
- 3) causes us to be added to the church Acts 2:47,
- 4) enables us to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38),
- 5) removes (washes away) our sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16),
- 6) conveys us into the kingdom (John 3:5, Col. 1:13),
- 7) transfers us into the family of God, as his children (John 1:12-13, Eph. 1:5),
- 8) puts us into a saved condition where we can know we have eternal life (1 John 5:13),
- 9) enables us to have our sins continually forgiven if we walk in the light (1 John 1:6-9),
- 10) qualifies us to partake of the body and blood of Christ in communion, John 5:53-58, 1 Corinthians 10:14-16.
- 11) etc.

None of these effects of baptism are in question or in the slightest way doubted. As we experience a valid baptism all these benefits are accrued to us, without exception, reservation or variation. All these benefits are given to us by God. God does all these things to us and for us. We do none of them!!!

But notice I said a “valid” baptism. If a baptism is **invalid** then for that person to be saved he/she must be **RE-baptized**. We use this word accomodatingly, knowing that if the first immersion was not a valid baptism it was no baptism at all. Therefore a later immersion which was a valid baptism, was the first and only baptism. Likewise, if the first one was valid, the second one was just a getting wet for the psychological benefit and spiritual confidence of the recipient.

We know that the reason for submitting to the act of baptism is important. So important, in fact, that if it is done for social reasons (there are nice people in this church and I need some friends), financial reasons (these people have plenty of money and I am a salesman), emotional reasons (my psychiatrist says I need some trusting friends), or for reasons of the heart (I want to marry this girl and she won’t have me unless I’m baptized), then the baptism is **invalid**. This should not be considered an exhaustive list.

Another situation to be considered is the person who is taught the false doctrine that baptism does not save and is not necessary. If the person believes that false doctrine, and

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is baptized believing that baptism does not save, then it is probable that the immersion experience did not have its saving effect. At least there would be strong doubt that it did. Since re-baptism is so easy, with no negative side-effects, it would probably be wise to be re-baptized knowing your sins will be "washed away" (Acts 22:16) and be sure of the saving results! The confidence you have afterwards is worth the small trouble of re-baptism!"

In this chapter my sole purpose is to examine what the Bible tells us must be in the mind of the recipient at the time of baptism. The saving results of a valid baptism are not in question. The precursors of baptism (faith, repentance, confession) are not in question. The benefits of a valid baptism, listed above, are not in question. What God does for us and to us in baptism is not in question. The necessity of baptism is not in question. For this chapter, the only question is: what is the reason, *in the mind of the recipient at the time*, that ensures his dipping will be a saving experience; a valid baptism? In other words, what must a person understand as his reason for submitting to baptism. If the reason was one of those mentioned in the previous paragraph, then his baptism is *invalid*, of no spiritual significance, and was just a *getting wet*.

Although the passage in Acts 19:1-7 does not directly pertain to our discussion, a few observations are in order.

1 ¶ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. 4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

Since the disciples who were re-baptized had previously received John's baptism (v. 3) and no one today fits into that category, this passage does not help us in determining if and when a re-baptism should occur today. It is noteworthy, however, that when Paul discovered that they had not receive the Holy Spirit when they believed (v. 2b) his follow-up question was very interesting. Some seem to think that Paul should have asked "Were you baptized for the remission of sins?" But he did not. His follow up question was (ASV) "into what were you baptized?" When Paul heard their answer and explained John's baptism he then re-baptized them.

Is there just one acceptable reason that transforms "getting wet" into a saving experience? If so, what is it? Must the recipient know, understand, and agree to the fact that his baptism will save him (wash his sins away) for his baptism to be valid? Is it possible something even more fundamental than that could validate his baptism?

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In answering this question we must discuss three things: two passages and one event: Acts 2:38 and 1 Pet. 3:21 and the baptism of Jesus.

Others have approached the problem more indirectly (see appendix 6a), but based on what I have read so far, if we eliminate all comments which are, in reality, begging the question (assuming what is to be proved), the real questions to consider are these three:

I) Whether the prepositional phrase “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38 is part of the command to be baptized, implying that the recipient of baptism must know this reason for baptism and be receiving baptism for that reason. This then implies a person must know that reason for baptism and accept it at the time of baptism in order for his baptism to be valid. Which, in turn, implies that not knowing that reason at the time of baptism, invalidates the baptism.

II) Does 1 Pet. 3:21 give a reason that validates baptism that is based on a “good conscience toward God,” rather than on the knowledge of when we receive the forgiveness of sins?

III) Does the baptism of Jesus tell us anything about why *we* should be baptized?

I) Acts 2:38 *“Peter replied, “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.”*

Is the command in Acts 2:38: “repent and be baptized ...for the remission of sins?” Or is the command limited to “repent and be baptized” only, while the following phrase “so that sins might be forgiven” is a statement of the results or consequence of obeying the command. Please let it be noted, and I say it again only for emphasis, we are not questioning or doubting that baptism forgives sins and saves us. We know that, but if “for the remission of sins” is part of the command, then we must know it, and know that we know it, and accept it as our reason for baptism at the time of baptism for our baptism to be valid.

If “for the remission of sins” is not part of the command then it is only an explanation of what happens at baptism and is logically the same as receiving the Holy Spirit, which does not have to be understood or even known at the time of baptism for the indwelling to occur. If “for the remission of sins” is not part of the command then this passage gives us no information as to what we must have in our minds as the reason for our baptism and we must look elsewhere to answer that question.

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Baptism is a passive act for the recipient; that is, it is not something he does but instead it is something that is done to him. Baptism is something he submits to or receives, not something he does. So Brown & Comfort as well as Marshall in their interlinears give “let be baptized” for βαπτισθητω. We might say “let yourselves be baptized.” Also note: “**εις** αφεσιν των αμαρτιων” can validly be translated “**so that** sins might be forgiven” (see “εις” BAG, second edition, 4., f., fourth example, p.229). So one valid translation would be “repent and let be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that sins might be forgiven.” This translation makes a big difference to our English ear. In this translation it seems more like the phrase “so that sins might be forgiven” is not part of the command but only a specification of the results of the baptism.

The two phrases in between the command and its purpose can’t be ignored because the word order, or sentence structure, is the biggest part of the evidence in answering our question. These in-between-words tend to separate the command from the purpose, which does not lend weight to the theory that the purpose is, indeed, part of the command. If Luke had said “Let every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, repent and be baptized for the remission of sins,” it would lend support to the idea that the result is indeed part of the command. So we must pay careful attention to the words and their order. So the translation “repent and let be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that sins might be forgiven” must be given serious consideration.

If “*repent and let be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that sins might be forgiven*” is a valid translation, then those who believe that the forgiveness phrase is part of the command must be able to prove that, using this translation. You see, those who think the recipient of baptism, at the time of baptism, must **know** that he was not saved before baptism and that his sins are forgiven at baptism, must prove that, and must be able to prove it with at least as much clarity as the other facets of baptism, such as the results of baptism (salvation).

If the forgiveness phrase can’t be proven to be part of the command with that same degree of clarity, then we have God requiring a very specific thought at a specific and critical time in the process of conversion, and that fact being less clear than the result that baptism forgives sins.

So if the necessity of **knowing** that you are saved at baptism is not clearly taught it could be missed by many, especially those just coming to Christ and just beginning their Christian walk. Is it clear from “repent and let be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that sins might be forgiven” that the remission phrase is part of the command? In my judgment, it definitely is not clear. The fact that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins **is** clear from any translation. Likewise if the “forgiveness” phrase is part of the command in Acts 2:38, that fact must be supported by any **valid** translation.

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When a Bible command is followed by “εἰς” (for or so that) and then a purpose, many times the purpose is not part of the command. For example: 1) Romans 6:12 ***“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that [εἰς] you obey its evil desires.”*** The command: “do not let sin reign” followed by εἰς, then the purpose or reason for the command. Would anyone say that we could not obey this command unless we knew the purpose of it? Could we not obey this command “from the heart” unless we knew the purpose, and the knowledge of the purpose was in our mind at the time we obeyed it? If we obeyed it just because the Holy Spirit said it, not knowing the reason He said it, would our obedience not be acceptable? Would our action of “not letting sin reign in our body” **not** be considered obedience because we didn’t know the reason Paul gave for the command? If we obeyed just because the Lord said it, not knowing the reason, would we receive the promised result, or not?

2) 2 Corinthians 8:24 ***“Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you so that [εἰς] the churches can see it.”***

The command: “show ...the proof ...and the reason for our pride...”

εἰς (so that)

The reason: “the churches can see it.”

Is it possible to obey this command without knowing the reason for it? If the Corinthians “show the proof” without knowing the purpose for it, was it not obedience? Must they have had the purpose in their mind at the time they showed the proof or else it was not obedience from the heart and in faith?

Might someone say these examples are not parallel to Acts 2:38 because the purpose or reason for the command does not include a reward as the Acts passage does? This implies that we don’t have to know the purpose or reason in order to obey, unless, or course, the purpose contains a promised reward. In that case we must know the purpose and have that purpose in our minds at the time we obey else it is not considered obedience in faith and from the heart AND we will not receive whatever reward is promised.

Surely, brethren, we have not reached that level of confidence in our own great wisdom and propensity for logic as to tell babes in Christ or those trying to become babes that in order to be acceptable to Christ they must know the difference between obeying a command because Christ said it and obeying it because you understand and agree with the reason given for the command. To add refinement to logic *ad nauseam*, it’s OK to obey without knowing the reason, unless the reason includes a promised reward, then you must know and believe in the promised reward and have that purpose in mind at the time you obey in order to receive the reward! Surely brethren, all reasonable people can see how unreasonable this is.

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But for those who have reached this level of refinement and think the previous paragraph is reasonable, consider the following examples:

3) 1 Peter 3:7 ***“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that [εἰς] nothing will hinder your prayers.”***

The command: “...be considerate ...treat them with respect... and as heirs...”

εἰς (so that)

The promised reward: “your prayers will not be hindered.”

The purpose or reason for the command is a promise, i.e. “your prayers will not be hindered.” If a person obeys the command without knowing the reason for the command will he receive the promised result of “unhindered prayers”? Would some say that the promised result of unhindered prayers is withheld unless the person obeying the command is aware of the promise and has that in his mind at the time of obedience? If some say this, they must prove it. What evidence can be offered to prove such a monumental claim?

I can certainly understand if you are tired of examples, but please allow two more, because they most closely parallel our passage in Acts 2:38.

4) Would Naaman be a better example to compare to our baptism? I think so. Both situations involve a single person. Naaman dirty with leprosy, we are dirty with sins. Both are commanded to be dipped in water. Both are promised cleansing. Did Naaman know of the promise? Yes. Did Naaman believe the promise and act “in faith and wholeheartedly?” You decide as you read the entire text, 2 Kings 5:1-15. The last eight verses are repeated here for your convenience:

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Make the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 ¶ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. 13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'?" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. 15 ¶ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and

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said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant."

Did Naaman believe the promise and act "in faith and wholeheartedly?" Did Naaman receive the blessing? Yes. How does this story impact our quest for truth regarding whether we must know the "remission phrase" (from Acts 2:38) at the time of baptism?

5) Please note that both commands, Acts 2:38 and Luke 5:4-6 were written by Luke "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for [εἰς] a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break."

The command: Go "into deep water ...let down the nets..."

εἰς (for)

The promised reward: "a catch"

Did Peter understand the purpose? Yes. Did Peter act from Faith and "wholeheartedly" at the time of obedience believing that the purpose would be fulfilled? You decide as you read the text noting that Peter said "**But because you say so.**" Did Peter receive the fulfillment of the promised purpose? Yes!

If all, **or any**, of these examples show that many times the purpose for the command is not part of the command, then there must be specific evidence to prove that the purpose for baptism is part of the command to be baptized in Acts 2:38. Lacking this specific evidence we must conclude that for anyone to require that a person must: 1) understand the purpose, 2) accept the purpose, and 3) have the purpose in mind as the command is obeyed in order to receive the promised results is requiring more than Luke did and is holding a position contrary to scripture, logic and common sense.

II) 1 Peter 3:21 "¶ ...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,..."

If the promised reward in Acts 2:38 is not part of the command, then knowing that promised reward is not what validates the act of baptism. Is it possible that there is another reason for the action of baptism that might validate it and make it acceptable to God?

The thing that makes immersion a valid and saving experience is not the physical washing.....

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NIV: “but the **pledge (or response)** of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

Weymouth: “but the **craving of** a good conscience after God-through the resurrection of Jesus..”

ASV: “but the **interrogation of** a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

RSV: “but as an **appeal to God for** a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

McCord: “but the **appeal to God of** a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Jerusalem: “but a **pledge (or request)** made to God **from** a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

KJV: “but the **answer** of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

Interlinears: for “**επερωτημα**”

Marshall: “but **an answer** of a good conscience toward God, through resurrection of Jesus...”

Brown/Comfort: “but [the] **pledge** of a good conscience toward God, through resurrection...”

Berry: “but [the] **demand** towards God **of** a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Lexicons:

BAG: “1) Question, 2) request, appeal; ‘an appeal to God for a clear conscience’ 1 Pet. 3:21, but **also** ‘a pledge to God proceeding from a clear conscience.’”

Thayer’s: “1) an inquiry, a question. 2) a demand 3) Such terms often get the signification of earnest seeking, i.e. a craving, an intense desire ... If this use of the word is conceded ... ‘which baptism now saves you not because ... but because you have earnestly sought a conscience reconciled to God.’ ‘Others would adhere to the (more analogical) passive sense ... the thing asked (the demand) **of a good conscience** towards God” the same as the avowal of a consecration unto him.”

TDNT: “ ‘Not the putting away of outward filth, but prayer to God for a good conscience.’ Greeven commented on the verse in question ‘Thus the request for a good conscience is to be construed as a prayer for the remission of sins.’ ”

Lenski’s Commentary: “The sacrament ‘saves’ because it is not a mere outward rite but ‘an offer of a good conscience toward God through Jesus Christ’s resurrection,’”

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There is obviously some ambiguity as to the actual meaning of the word ‘επερωτημα’ (pledge or request) in this passage. I accept and take my stand on the idea that baptism, in this passage, is the manifestation (pledge) of a good conscience toward God. My reasons are as follows:

- 1) The preponderance of the evidence listed above,
- 2) God would not allow the truth to be determined by less evidence than a false alternative.
- 3) The alternative; accepting baptism (after believing that Jesus was/is, indeed the son of God) as a sign or outward gesture requesting or asking God for a good conscience is a contradiction in terms. You do not request what you already have. If you have faith in Christ and the inner desire to be pleasing to God manifested by your acceptance of baptism, you already have a good conscience toward God!

A conscience is having the internal capacity to determine right from wrong. (see appendix 6b) A *good* conscience is having a conscience which motivates toward good more than towards evil. A good conscience *toward God* is a conscience which allows and desires God to define the good and motivates you to act in harmony with God’s will, and is submissive to His will as it is known. This conclusion is based on the definition of the word ‘conscience’ and other verses which use “good conscience” given in the appendix 6b and 6c. The obvious desire to please God by accepting what He said to do by submitting to Christ in baptism is evidence of a good conscience toward God, not a request for a good conscience.

- 4) Since baptism is *passive* and “asking” is *active*, it seems incongruous to me to interpret a *passive* act to mean an *active* action of asking God for something. It seems much more congruous to me to interpret the passive (submissive) act of baptism as the result of a good (or submissive) conscience.

Therefore the baptism (βαπτισμα) of 1 Pet. 3:21 is a saving experience because the action proceeds from a good conscience toward God. If you disagree and think **επερωτημα** should be a request for a good conscience, then we must conclude that this request is what makes the immersion a saving experience. ***Which would imply that not having this request for a good conscience in your mind at the time of baptism would invalidate your baptism.*** Think about that! How many people who accept baptism do so asking for a good conscience at the time of the baptism?

Sometimes it is instructive to note what is not said. We are not told that our dipping or immersion is validated by our knowledge that forgiveness of sins accompanies the act. It is validated by the fact that it issues from a good conscience toward God. Of course, the more the recipient knows about it, the better. But, that is not our question. Our question is what is the minimum one has to know in order for the ‘washing’ (dipping, immersion) to be a saving experience.

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The answer: A person's actions must be the result of a good conscience toward God. The specificity of a knowledge of the forgiveness of sins is not mentioned.

The Baptism of Jesus

III) Does the baptism of Jesus tell us anything about why *we* should be baptized?

Can we learn anything about the reason for our baptism by understanding the reason for the baptism of Jesus? Yes, of course, we all know that since Jesus had no sins he could not have been baptized for the remission of sins. Why then was he baptized? If we could possibly follow his example, should we?

The Text is Matthew 3: *"13 ¶ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' 15 Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"*

Jesus said *"it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."* What exactly does that mean? The Greek word for righteousness is δικαιοσύνην. Checking our standard Greek authorities we have:

Thayer: "integrity, virtue, purity of life, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting: Matt. 3:15,"

B.A.G.: "righteousness in the sense of fulfilling the divine statutes Matt. 3:15."

TDNT, vol. II, page 198, 2. : "If ... [then] We may first maintain that δικαιοσύνην is almost always used in the NT [New Testament - cb] for the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him, for rectitude of life [conduct according to moral principles - cb] before God, for uprightness before His judgment." and in paragraph 2a., same page, we have: "In Matthew 3:15 [it] means that in presenting Himself for baptism Jesus emphasises as His task, not ... the establishment of right, which would be one act, but the right conduct which He will fulfill and which will be pleasing to God."

"To fulfill all righteousness" means His conduct (His baptism) will be correct and in harmony with God's will, fulfilling the divine statutes and the right conduct which will be pleasing to God. In other words because He was motivated by His love for God and His commitment to God's law. He submitted His will to the Father's and was baptized.

Since Jesus only did what His father told Him to do,

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John 5:19 "Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ... 30 By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." -- see also John 5:36, 6:38, etc.

and since He only said what His father told Him to say,

"John 7:16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." John 12:49 "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say,"

His baptism must be an act in obedience and submission to His father.

In our more colloquial language we might say He was baptized because His father told him to! Thereby demonstrating His good conscience. Now if His God is our God and His father is our father (John 20:17) and Jesus was baptized because God told him to, why isn't that reason good enough for us? Why can't we follow His example and receive baptism because God said do it? If we were obedient to the Father in submitting to baptism, it is unlikely that we would not know about the forgiveness of our sins at that time, but we cannot require it to validate baptism since the scriptures do not.

Yes, I know that Jesus had no sins, so He couldn't receive baptism for the remission of sins. But that is not the issue.

We are not asking why Jesus couldn't follow our example! We are asking why shouldn't we follow His example?

Since obedience to the father was an adequate reason for Jesus' baptism, why shouldn't it be an adequate reason for ours?

So when our conduct is correct and in harmony with God's will, fulfilling the divine statutes and right conduct which is pleasing to God we too are fulfilling righteousness, i.e. doing what is right. Again I ask, why can't we fulfill this act of righteousness (baptism) for the same reason that Jesus fulfilled all righteousness, and have that reason be sufficient?

We must be careful. We don't want to conclude that there is something Jesus did for a reason that we cannot emulate (unless specifically told that we can't use Jesus' reason for our own), for if there is one of Jesus' motives we can't or shouldn't strive to duplicate then there may be others. How, then, do we know which of His motives we should take as our own?

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Let it be noted that even Jesus *had to be baptized* else He would not have fulfilled all righteousness. His task from the father was to fulfill all righteousness, part of which was to be baptized. Thus His baptism *was as necessary as ours*.

In conclusion it can be said that we have demonstrated that the “remission” phrase of Acts 2:38 is not part of the command, that having a good conscience toward God is sufficient reason to validate our baptism (1 Peter 3:21) and that we, too, can learn from and follow the example of Jesus’ baptism as to act and motive.

If this discussion does not give you confidence in your salvation then please do whatever is necessary to give you that confidence. If you doubt the validity of your baptism then do the only thing that will give you that confidence, be re-baptized.

APPENDIX 6a

What others say

1) John 8:31-32 *“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”*

What truth or how much truth must we have to be set free? Some have quoted this passage to support the idea that if you do not know the specific truth that baptism saves you, then you will not be set free from your sins at baptism. The passage says “If” you hold to my teachings “then” you will know the truth. But how can you “hold to the teachings” unless you first know them? If you know the teachings, then you know the truth, because His teachings are the truth. So, what does it mean to say “If you hold to my teachings (which are the truth) ...then you will know the truth...”

There must be a symbiotic relationship between “hold to my teachings” and “know the truth.” The only reasonable conclusion is that you learn a little, hold to it, are set free by it (the truth you know) then constantly repeat the cycle. The goal is to learn all the truth and be completely set free, not only from sin but from worry, guilt, uncertainty and anxiety. In other words we are set free according to how much truth we know and hold on to.

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But we must be careful when we specificize this passage. We must not say or imply that knowing all the truth is necessary in order to be set free, for no one ever knows all the truth about anything, especially a new born babe in Christ. Since a babe in Christ is not required to know all the truth about baptism before he can enjoy the full benefits of being immersed, the question remains “what truth and how much does he need to know” and..... who decides? It has been said that you must know “the basic teachings about the act of baptism...” and then the basic teachings are defined to be that “forgiveness of sins” accompanies baptism. In other words, the only way this passage can help us is if we *assume* that the truth we must know to be set free, is the truth that baptism is for the remission of sins. Could there be a better example of begging the question? In reality this passage does not help us at all in answering the question about what must we know at the time of immersion for that immersion to be a valid baptism. We must look elsewhere.

2) Romans. 6:17 ***“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.”***

Some have used this passage to imply that submitting to baptism without knowing that it saves you cannot be done “from the heart or wholeheartedly” and therefore this baptism is invalid. We know the Romans obeyed the “form of teaching” they were taught. We are confident that they were taught correctly and they obeyed from the heart. All the people in Acts 2 were taught correctly and sufficiently and also obeyed from the heart. But an example of some who were taught correctly and obeyed from the heart does not even discuss the minimum knowledge needed to be acceptable to God at the beginning of your spiritual life.

Have we never met a Baptist, a Mormon, or a Jehovah’s witness who acted wholeheartedly and from the heart. Acting sincerely is not even part of the discussion. Of course we must act “from the heart” and wholeheartedly. Surely no one would require truth as a prerequisite to wholeheartedness lest we condemn Paul as a liar or a hypocrite (cf.. Acts 23:1) and Apollos as insincere, Acts 18:24-25. Have we never ourselves, at some time, acted with all sincerity and wholeheartedness about something, only to find out later we were wrong? If truth is required before something can be done “from the heart” then I ask “How much truth?” Must we know all the truth about baptism before our baptism can be considered valid? If not all the truth, then how much? And *who decides* which part of the truth must be known to be acceptable?

If it be said that the candidate must know the most basic aspect of baptism i.e., that it is for forgiveness, then I ask who determines what is “the most basic” thing about baptism? I think the MOST basic thing about baptism is that God says to do it. And based on what scripture do we decide that more knowledge is required before baptism? What about the person who was baptized only because God said it, not having read Acts 2:38 or 22:16 (or maybe reading it but not understanding)? I think that 1 Pet 3:21 is the

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only verse that tells us the minimum of what should be in the mind of the recipient at baptism. Based on these scriptures and logic I think we can agree that Romans. 6:17 does not help us in our quest for the truth in answering this simple question: “what must I know at the time of baptism for my baptism to be valid?”

3) Heb. 11:6, 30 (6)

“ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. ... (30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.”

Some reason from this passage like this:

- a) By faith the walls fell. Faith, that is, in God’s promise to make the walls fall.
- b) The walls fell only because the Israelites had faith in God’s promise to make the walls fall.
- c) The walls would not have fallen if the people had not had the faith that God would do it, because God would not be pleased without this faith and wouldn’t do it if not pleased.
- d) Our sins are forgiven in baptism only because of our faith in God’s promise to forgive them.
- e) If we don’t have this faith, for any reason, our sins will not be forgiven by baptism, like the walls of Jericho would not have fallen if the people had not had faith that God would do it.
- f) Baptism without faith that God will forgive sins is not pleasing to God because “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Heb. 11:6

This is an interesting argument. But if you notice, everything in it, after the first sentence, is all supposition. Of course I can’t prove that any of this reasoning is false, since we can’t prove a negative. But several questions should be asked and answered by all who seek the truth, i.e.

1) Were the Israelites ever told of God’s promise that the wall would fall? It is recorded that God told Joshua in Joshua. 6:5. But did Joshua tell all the Israelites? And did all the Israelites believe it?

Of course, it is necessary to assume that Joshua did tell everyone that God promised that the walls would fall and that all of Israel believed it, if we are to believe the above logic. But it is equally probable that the walls fell because the Israelites had faith in God’s commands to march, trusting that something good would happen from obeying God, not necessarily his promise that the walls would fall.

2) When you say the faith of the Israelites, do you mean all the Israelites, every single one of them? Probably not, as they were notoriously and frequently unfaithful as a group. Some probably marched around Jericho, by the fifth or sixth day at least, doubting the results. But why is this important? The whole thrust of this argument is that no one can receive the blessing promised by God (as a result of obeying a

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command), unless they know the promise, accept the promise and have the promise in mind as they obey the command. I think it is reasonable to assume that some in this example received the blessing without having the requisite faith. Was the purpose for the marching, for the walls to fall, considered a part of the command to march? [See above **I Acts 2:38**]

Also consider the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This indwelling is a promise of God which is fulfilled at our baptism. Can we or anyone actually have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit without knowing and believing the promise, at the time of baptism?

3) Is step d) in the argument listed above, *“Our sins are forgiven in baptism only because of our faith in God’s promise to forgive them,”* begging the question?

4) Can all the assumptions about the Jericho example be proven true? I think not, but even if they can, how does this example impact our study about knowing and believing the forgiveness phrase in Acts 2:38 at the time of baptism? If we can allow a few among the Israelites, who did not have the requisite faith, to receive the benefits, can we also allow that one person might not have the faith that God forgives sins at baptism and still receive the benefits, i.e. forgiveness? If not, why not?

5) Is the Jericho example a usable parallel to our question of knowing the forgiveness phrase at the time of baptism? I think not because it deals with a group, a very large group with many variations in faith and motives, whereas our question of a valid baptism is a very personal question of one person’s thinking at a very specific time.

6) Would Naaman be a much better example? I think so. Both situations involve a single person. Naaman dirty with leprosy, new converts dirty with sins. Both are commanded to be dipped in water. Both are promised cleansing. Did Naaman know of the promise? Yes. Did Naaman believe the promise and act “in faith and wholeheartedly?” You decide as you read the text. 2 Kings 5:1-15. Did Naaman receive the blessing? Yes. How does this story impact our quest for truth regarding whether we must believe the “remissions phrase” at the time of our baptism?

7) If our sins are not forgiven at baptism because we do not know that one of the purposes of baptism is to forgive sins and we determine this because it cannot be “of faith” and, without faith is impossible to please God, **then** that baptism (or getting wet) is also sin, because “and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

Or maybe you think I have misused Romans 14:23. If you think so, you should also consider the immediate context of Heb. 11:6 and ask yourself if possibly **it** is being misused in this argument. The writer of Hebrews specifically defines the faith he is talking about in 11:6. Is it the faith that comes from believing every truth in the Bible, individually, or is it the faith that God exists and rewards those who accept this fact?

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APPENDIX 6b

English definition of “conscience”

The Century Dictionary: “The consciousness that the acts for which a person believes himself to be responsible do or do not conform to his ideal of right; the moral judgment of the individual applied to his own conduct, in distinction from his perception of right or wrong in the abstract, and in the conduct of others.”

Webster’s New World Dictionary: “A knowledge or sense of right and wrong, with an urge to do right; moral judgment that opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle and that leads to feelings of guilt if one violates such a principle.”

The American College Dictionary: “the internal recognition of right and wrong as regards one’s actions and motives; the faculty which decides upon the moral quality of one’s actions and motives, enjoining one to conformity with the moral law.”

Greek: συνειδησις (conscience)

BAG: “moral consciousness, conscience”

Thayer: “**b.** the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending the one, condemning the other; conscience: ... a conscience reconciled to God, 1 Pet. 3:21”

TDNT: The TDNT has twenty full pages on this word’s history and usage from the 5th century B.C. to the post-apostolic fathers. V.7, pg. 914 we have “Hence συνειδησις means a ‘percipient and active self-awareness’ ... ‘it is man himself aware of himself in perception and acknowledgment, in willing and acting.’” And our passage is translated as “the request to God for a good conscience.

APPENDIX 6c

ALL SCRIPTURES WHERE “GOOD CONSCIENCE” IS USED IN THE NIV

Ac 23:1 ¶ Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all **good conscience** to this day."

1 Tim 1:5 ¶ The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith.

1 Tim 1:19 holding on to faith and a **good conscience**. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

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ALL SCRIPTURES WHERE “CLEAR CONSCIENCE” IS USED IN THE NIV.

1 Tim. 3:9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a **clear [Gk. = clean] conscience**.

2 Tim. 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a **clear [Gk. = clean] conscience**, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

Heb. 13:18 ¶ Pray for us. We are sure that we have a **clear [Gk. = good] conscience** and desire to live honorably in every way.

1 Pet. 3:16 ¶ keeping a **clear[Gk=good] conscience**, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.