



# GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!

(#134)

Baptism – When verses challenge your thinking.

### HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO A SCRIPTURE PASSAGE THAT SAYS SOMETHING UNEXPECTED?

**PANIC?**



**IGNORE IT?**



**VOTE ON IT?**



**CHANGE IT TO WHAT WE WANT IT TO SAY?**

### IF WE RESPOND THE WAY THE BIBLE INSTRUCTS US TO, WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR!

... they received the word with great eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily**, to see whether these things were so.

Acts 17:11b (NASB)

... you **accepted it for what it really is**—the word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13b (GW)

- ✓ *The original audience* would have understood its meaning. (If it's difficult for us, it's because we aren't in their situation.)
- ✓ "Difficult" passages will not contradict the rest of what Scripture says. So even if we can't reach a final conclusion, it's OK.



But responding this way *does* require us to be willing to look and think!

*(NO verse in all of Scripture praises laziness!)*

- ① Pay attention to the words, how they fit together, and the context.
- ② Find out what other verses say.
- ③ If you find verses that appear to conflict, find out why. (Don't assume they contradict each other.)
- ④ Realize that understanding Scripture is a *growing* process. God's ways are *not* our ways; and *our* views need to change.



### HOW to get false teaching and false religions from the Bible. (NOT recommended, but many do it.)

✓ Start with a focus on half of the truth (ignoring or denying the other half).

**THIS VERSE SAYS THAT JESUS WAS HUMAN.**

**ALL IT PROVES IS THAT YOU IGNORED HALF THE TRUTH!**

**THAT PROVES HE WASN'T GOD!**

**IT PROVES THAT ALL THOSE OTHER VERSES DON'T MEAN WHAT THEY SAY!**

**THAT'S BACKWARDS!**

✓ Start by selecting an obscure verse and use it to change the meaning of many others.

### ON THE TOPIC OF "BAPTISM," THERE ARE 2 DIFFICULT-TO-UNDERSTAND VERSES.

**WE DON'T NEED TO PANIC** (or ignore, change, or vote on their meaning), **BECAUSE:**

- ① We've already seen the consistent message that Scripture has on this issue – in both Old and New Testaments.
- ② We've looked at many verses, in many contexts; and they all present a unified theme.

Ultimately, it's all from the same God! An obscure verse may increase our understanding of an issue (sometimes); but in any case, it won't go against the rest of what God has said!

Every word of God proves true.

Proverbs 30:5b (NLT)

**THERE ARE OTHER LEGITIMATE WAYS TO USE THE WORD "BAPTISM."**  
**THESE ARE NOT A PROBLEM.**

⇒ **Symbolism.**

They were all **baptized** into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.  
 1 Corinthians 10:2 (NIV) REFERRING TO THE ISRAELITES WHO CAME OUT OF EGYPT.

⇒ **References to something being washed.**

- Eating utensils.  
 ... the **washing** of cups and pitchers and copper pots.  
 Mark 7:4b (NASB) (SAME N.T. GREEK WORD, BUT TRANSLATED DIFFERENTLY.)
- Ceremonial rituals.  
 ... the Pharisee ... was amazed that [Jesus] did not first perform the ritual **washing** before dinner.  
 Luke 11:38 (CSB)

⇒ **Figurative uses of the word.**

- Being "overwhelmed" by something.  
 I have a **baptism** to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is finished!  
 Luke 12:50 (NET) JESUS, REFERRING TO HIS COMING DEATH ON THE CROSS.

⇒ **Passages that may have more than one possible interpretation.**

... the elementary instructions about Christ... teaching about **baptisms**, ...  
 Hebrews 6:1b, 2a (NET)

The original Jewish readers would have understood this. But we may wonder whether it refers to "Christian baptism," or to "Jewish ceremonial washings" (and what they symbolized), or even to both (since the word is plural)?  
 (None of these options leads us into false teaching and heresy!)

**HERE ARE THE TWO "PROBLEM PASSAGES":**

⇒ **A verse that says something about baptism "saving" us.**

**Baptism**, which corresponds to this [= the flood of Noah's day], now saves you...  
 1 Peter 3:21a (CSB)

⇒ **A verse that mentions "baptism for the dead."**

Otherwise, what will those do who are **baptized for the dead**? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are they **baptized** for them?  
 1 Corinthians 15:29 (NET)

Some false religions have teachings and practices based on these two passages, ignoring the context and the testimony of the rest of Scripture.

**PROBLEM #1** **WE'LL START WITH THE VERSE THAT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT BAPTISM "SAVING" US.**

**DOES BAPTISM "SAVE" US?**

⇒ **Below is the section of this passage that focuses on baptism.**  
 If we pay attention to the context, we will realize that it doesn't mean this!

In [Noah's ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes **baptism** that now **saves** you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.

It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ...  
 1 Peter 3:20b-21 (NIV)

**IT MAY BE COLD, BUT AT LEAST IT SAVED ME!**



**The CONTEXT and ANALOGY:**

⇒ **The wider context:**

- Peter is making analogies – using events in the *past* to explain issues pertaining to Christ and our relationship to him *now*.
- The original readers may have easily understood these analogies; but we live in a *different* context, and may find them somewhat difficult to understand.

⇒ **The immediate context & analogy:**

- AT THE FLOOD:** The water is the symbol. Noah's family (in the ark) went into the water; and later came out of it alive. **The OLD life (pre-flood world) was gone; the NEW had begun.**
- AT BAPTISM:** The water is the symbol. We (in Christ) go down into the water (representing death/burial); and then come up out of it (representing new life). **The OLD life (before salvation) is gone; the NEW has begun.**

**What about baptism and SALVATION? What saves us?**

Peter does not leave us to guess. He tells us specifically: ↘

... and this water [of the Flood] symbolizes **baptism** that now **saves** you also ...

- ✓ **It is NOT the physical act!**
  - Although the physical act symbolizes it.
- ✓ **It is the internal change, made possible by Jesus' resurrection!**
  - Jesus has cleansed our consciences (Hebrews 9:14), so we can now live for him.

—not the removal of dirt from the body ...

but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.

It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ...  
 1 Peter 3:21 (NIV)

**THE OLD WAY OF LIFE IS GONE; THE NEW HAS COME!** (2 Corinthians 5:17)

**THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH LINKING THE WORD SAVE TO THE WORD BAPTISM ... IF YOU VIEW SALVATION AS A PROCESS.**

- ✓ Since salvation is a "process" of several actions (some by God, some by people), we can expect all parts to be there.
- ✓ If one of the actions in this "process of salvation" occurs in a person's life, we can expect all of them to be present (if it's genuine salvation).
- ✓ Since, in genuine salvation, separate parts of the process would not be occurring without the other parts, the word "save" can be associated with many (or all) of the parts.

**THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT WE FIND!**

NONE of these verses should be used to "cancel" the rest of what the Bible says about salvation!

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For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.  
Romans 10:13 (CSB)

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation ...  
2 Corinthians 7:10a (NIV)

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.  
2 Thessalonians 2:10b (NIV)

... whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it.  
Mk 8:35b (CSB)

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.  
1 Timothy 4:16 (NIV)

... the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.  
Matthew 10:22b (NIV)

... baptism, which now saves you, ...  
1 Pe 3:21b (NLT)

For by grace you are saved through faith ...  
Ephesians 2:8a (NET)

... with the mouth one confesses and is saved.  
Romans 10:10b (ESV)

There is also a wide range of passages that point out various parts of God's role in salvation.

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**PROBLEM #2** **WHAT ABOUT "BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD"?**  
**ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING THAT?**

Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?

And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."  
1 Corinthians 15:29-32 (NIV)

⇨ Is there a reason for this verse to influence what WE do?

**DO YOU NEED BAPTIZED FOR US?**



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**INITIAL OBSERVATIONS:**

- ✓ The context is about the folly of denying the physical resurrection of the body.
- ✓ The passage does not say WHO was doing the baptizing or WHY.
  - ⇨ Maybe it wasn't the Corinthians.
  - ⇨ Maybe it was the group that denied the resurrection.
  - ⇨ We just don't know.
- ✓ There is NO command or expression of approval in this statement!
  - ⇨ It does NOT say it was a good (or bad) practice; nor does it tell anyone to do it.
  - ⇨ No passage anywhere in Scripture commands us to do it – or even hints that we should do it!
  - ⇨ Simply put, regardless of why Paul mentioned it, it is NOT something we need to do!

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**LOOKING FOR AN ANSWER:**

- ✓ It's safe to say that the Corinthians (who received the letter) would have understood what was meant, whether or not we do.
- ✓ If understanding it was a life-or-death matter, God would have made its meaning sufficiently clear, so as to enable life.
- ✓ Paul says it to illustrate a point, not to prove it. Even if we omitted the verse, it would NOT change or affect the rest of what Paul is saying. So not understanding it will not hinder our ability to understand what he is telling us in the context.
- ✓ Most interpreters assume that some (not all) of the people in the Corinthian church were doing it (though the text doesn't specify).
- ✓ There are dozens (if not hundreds) of opinions about what the verse might mean; so don't be concerned if you don't reach a "final conclusion"! [Three suggestions will be mentioned.] →

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**SOME OF THE SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS CAN BE RULED OUT BY SIMPLY KNOWING SCRIPTURE.**

- ✓ It cannot mean anything that contradicts the rest of Scripture! This fact would eliminate many of the interpretations that have been suggested down through the centuries.

**EXAMPLE OF A VIEW that is often suggested, but which contradicts Scripture: The idea that the baptizing of a living person would CAUSE an unsaved dead person to become saved!**

- In later centuries (not in Paul's lifetime), there were false teachers who claimed that getting baptized for unsaved dead people would cause them to be saved.
- Water baptism ceased to be viewed as a picture of salvation, but came to be treated as a cause of salvation.
- *If this was what was happening, Paul would have strongly denounced it as heresy! It goes against the very nature of salvation!*

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### POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS THAT DO NOT CONTRADICT SCRIPTURE.

- ✓ Most likely, it was a custom that they practiced, which isn't commanded in the Bible, but didn't go against it, either.
- ✓ In that case, it would be no different than what churches do today – doing things that are not directly stated in Scripture, but which don't go against it.

Here are two suggested interpretations:

#### **Suggestion #1: Symbolically expressing the dead person's faith.**

- Perhaps there were people who became followers of Jesus and wanted to be baptized, but who died before they had the opportunity to do so.
- In this case, perhaps others were getting baptized to symbolically represent (publicly) that the now-dead Christian had chosen to follow Jesus. (Perhaps the now-dead Christian requested it.)

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### **Suggestion #2: Expressing the hope of seeing the dead (saved) person again.**

- Baptism is intended to be a public expression of loyalty to Jesus.
- Perhaps some were also using baptism as an opportunity to express (to the world) their confident hope that they would someday be re-united with their loved ones who had already died as Christians. (It would NOT be wrong to say this at a baptism!)
- [Some suggest that, perhaps the dying Christian was telling others to turn to Jesus and be saved, and the person now being baptized *did* turn to Jesus, because of what the dying Christian said.]

Obviously, if there was no physical resurrection, all of these views would be totally meaningless! It would make no sense at all... and that is the main point we need to know!

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### WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE ABOUT THESE PASSAGES?

- ✓ Scripture truth is NOT at the mercy of an obscure verse or two!
- ✓ We can find dozens or hundreds of clearly-understandable passages – who's testimony agrees with and reinforces the message of the whole group.

Regarding baptism, we have looked at dozens of verses, pertaining to a wide range of issues. All of them communicate a consistent unified message.

#### Principles we can LEARN and APPLY to other "difficult" passages:

- ✓ (1 Peter 3:21) We often can learn a lot by carefully studying the passage and its context.
- ✓ (1 Corinthians 15:29) If we fail to find the answer, it is not wrong to say, "I don't know what it means"! After all, we've seen the over-all uniform testimony of Scripture. Such a verse will not contradict the rest of what God has said!

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### YOUR MISSION REJOICE IN GOD AND IN HIS WORD!

⇒ He has given us ALL that we need for life and godliness!

⇒ He has made his Word clear, so if we are willing to:

- Search his Word,
- Accept what it says, and
- Submit to it

 **We will have nothing to fear,**  
when Jesus returns to judge the world!

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