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# WHAT IS SALVATION?

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As a public expression of the believer's new life in Christ, baptism requires that we first make a personal commitment to a relationship with God. With our acceptance and belief in God comes an incredible, life-altering gift: salvation from our sin.

It has been said that salvation from our sin is arguably the central theme of the Bible. But what exactly is salvation? Commonly defined as "deliverance from sin and its consequences, assured through our belief in Christ," salvation is the saving grace of God. It is God saving us from ourselves and our sin. Salvation is being saved *into* God!

A frequently held misconception among non-believers and believers alike is that we can influence our standing with God by virtue of our "goodness." While good deeds and behavior are vital components of our walk with Jesus, they do not ensure or even influence our salvation. This concept can be difficult for some to understand. After all, if you are a good person who attends church, reads the Bible, prays, tithes, and regularly exhibits other godly behaviors, shouldn't God take this into account? In short, the answer is "no." These good behaviors do not assure our standing with him because they are based on us. If our salvation were the result of the good things we do, it would effectively say that we are in control and deny God the credit he deserves. But salvation is not about us; it is all about him.

Noted author and theologian C.S. Lewis once wrote, “A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might be even more difficult to save.” The point is that merely being “nice” or “good” does not assure salvation because being “nice” or “good” doesn’t mean we don’t have sin in our life. And, thankfully, our sin does not prevent us from being saved. The apostle Paul wrote a lot about the meaning of salvation. In a letter he wrote to the church in Ephesus, we can see a clear and concise explanation of salvation. The second chapter of this letter starts by describing the human condition permeated by sin. In Ephesians 2:1-3, he writes,

**<sup>1</sup>Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. <sup>2</sup>You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. <sup>3</sup>All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.**

Simply put, without Jesus, we’re dead. Without Jesus, we are powerless over our sin. The human condition is a dead, sinful, disobedient state. This is not just about a specific group of people, but *everyone*. This is the bad news—that we are powerless to conquer our sin, and because of our sin, we were “subject to God’s anger.” But there is also good news. Paul continues in verses 4-5, **<sup>4</sup>But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, <sup>5</sup>that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)** This is the good news—the gospel—that Christians have been talking about for over two thousand years. Notice how Paul doesn’t tell us, “You were dead and disobedient,

but then *you* figured out how to live rightly!" No, instead Paul says, "You were dead and disobedient, but *God* gave you life." God is the focal point here. He is the one who has the power to save.

Why did God do this? Couldn't he have just left us to our sin? Perhaps, but he didn't. Paul sheds some light on this in the next few verses when he writes,

**6For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. 7So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.**

First, once we are saved, he seats us in the heavenly places with Jesus. Our salvation and place in heaven are secure from the moment we are saved. Again, this is not based on our good deeds. Second, he tells us that God will point to us in future ages to show his grace and kindness. He saved us because of his grace and mercy. We are examples of his grace and mercy. The opening line of the song "Amazing Grace" rings true: *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.* When we reflect on the human condition and how sinful we really are, God's grace is all the more amazing.

Paul ends this section of scripture by writing, **"8God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."** Again, we were powerless over our sin until God stepped in. Salvation, as Paul says, is a gift from God. He offers all people the gift of salvation.

Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of God's love is that salvation is ours for the taking when we accept him as our Lord and Savior. As theologian and church reformer John Calvin said, "Since no man is excluded from calling upon God, the gate of salvation is open to all. There is nothing else to hinder us from entering, but our own unbelief." We know we're saved when we believe Jesus died and rose from the dead to conquer our sin and that belief actually affects our lives. Theologians define saving faith as "knowledge, assent, and trust." Essentially, a saved person knows *about* Jesus, believes *in* Jesus, and *trusts* Jesus with his or her life. After a person turns their life over to Jesus, then they can get baptized to tell the world about their faith.

Once we know we have received the free gift of grace that gives us salvation, we get baptized to tell the world about it and celebrate what God has done in our lives.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

Have you ever struggled with believing your good deeds will influence your standing with God? Why is this not the case?

If you had to describe salvation to a friend, what would you say?

## Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

If you haven't and you want to, you can recite a prayer of acceptance. The prayer is not what saves you—it is Jesus alone who can save. The words represent your belief and trust in him. If you need words to pray, you can use these:

*Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner. I know that because of my sin, I am separated from you, but I want to be saved by you. I trust you with my whole life and want to completely turn it over to you. I know that it's only because of Jesus' death and resurrection that I can be saved by you. Help me to follow you for the rest of my life. I pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

## WHAT IS BAPTISM?

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Hebrews 11:1 says, **“Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.”**

While we cannot see Jesus, as Christians, we profess our faith in him as our Savior. Baptism is the public expression of that faith. It is signified by an immersion in—and emersion from—water, symbolizing our sins dying and us rising from the grave, just as Jesus died for our sins and rose to conquer them. Mark 16:16 says, **“Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned.”**

So what does it mean to be baptized? Pastor and author John Piper says it this way: “[Baptism] expresses union with Christ in His death and resurrection.” This belief is based on Romans 6:3-9. In this passage, Paul clearly explains to the reader what baptism represents.

Verses 3-4a read, **Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism.** Simply put, when we go under the water in baptism, we are symbolizing the spiritual truth that we have died to our sin. In the simple act of going under the water, we proclaim that because of the death of Jesus Christ, we are able to put to death our sin. Not only does our submersion into the water represent a union with Christ, but our coming out of the water does as well. Paul continues in verses 4b-5, **And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. <sup>5</sup>Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was.** When we come out of the water, we show that just as Jesus proved he conquered death when he rose from the tomb, we symbolize our conquering of our sin *only* through the resurrection of Jesus. Baptism represents our sins no longer having any power over us, because Christ died for them on the cross (represented by our submersion) and that we are given new life through his resurrection (represented by our rising out of the water).

Though baptism is a one-time event, it also serves as a constant reminder of what the death and resurrection of Jesus means to the believer. Paul continues in verses 6-9,

**<sup>6</sup>We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. <sup>7</sup>For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. <sup>8</sup>And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.**

Paul is telling us that our baptism, though a physical event in the past, can serve as a reminder of the spiritual truth that we are no longer under the power of sin. We can now live free because of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is a truth that can help you navigate through even the most difficult of times.

It's important to note that baptism actually has no *saving* power in and of itself; being baptized does not save anyone from their sin. Instead, it is symbolic of the saving work that has already taken place (see pages 2-3). The Bible teaches we are saved through faith alone, and while baptism is not a means to salvation, it does signify our faith in Christ. John Piper describes it this way: "Faith unites to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union." When we are united with Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. We have been set free from the power of death. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, **"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"**

#### QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

What does baptism symbolize?

# WHY GET BAPTIZED?

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Now we know what salvation is, and we know what baptism is (and isn't), but why should anyone get baptized? If it is not necessary for salvation, what's the point? Many theologians, past and present, have discussed this issue. The overwhelming consensus is that all believers should be baptized for three reasons: Jesus commanded it, Jesus did it, and it represents a commitment to Jesus.

## 1) Jesus commanded it.

In Matthew 28:18-20, we read about the mission Jesus gave his disciples. Christians today call it the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20 reads,

**<sup>18</sup>Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

Notice what he says before he gives the mission: **"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth."** We might be tempted to move right past this phrase and on to the command. Instead, we should pause and reflect on this phrase. Jesus tells his followers he has *all* authority. We can't know for sure *why* exactly he uttered this phrase, but it seems likely it was to remind

his disciples of his reign over all things and to say, “What I’m about to tell you is extremely important.” This seems all the more likely given that directly after this statement, he says, “Therefore.”

So now that we know the importance of what he’s about to say, we can move on to what he commands us (his followers) to do: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” He specifically commanded his disciples to go and baptize people. This applies directly to us. With all authority on heaven and earth, Jesus commands us to be baptized and to baptize others.

## **2) Jesus was baptized.**

We know that Jesus commanded it, but we also see Jesus being baptized in scripture. Matthew 3:13-15 reads,

**<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. <sup>14</sup>But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?” <sup>15</sup>But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.”**

When asked why he was being baptized, Jesus tells us because God requires it. Obviously, if baptism cleansed us of our sin, Jesus wouldn’t need to be baptized. Instead, Jesus was baptized because God commands it of us, and in his baptism, he identifies with us, his followers. We not only get baptized because Jesus commanded it, but also because in our baptism, we identify with Jesus.

### **3) Baptism represents a commitment to Jesus.**

Finally, we get baptized to represent our commitment to Jesus. If you've been to a wedding, you've likely heard the explanation for the wedding rings. They represent the spouses' commitment to one another. In the same way, baptism represents our public commitment to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It would be weird—and many might say inappropriate—for a husband to neglect to wear his wedding band. Similarly, for a Christian to neglect getting baptized is not consistent with salvation.

#### **QUESTION TO CONSIDER:**

What are the three reasons we should get baptized?

# YOUR NEXT STEP

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Now you understand what salvation is, what baptism is, and why you should be baptized. If you've decided your next step is to get baptized, congratulations! We are so excited for you, and we can't wait to celebrate with you. Here are some things you should know to prepare for your baptism:

## **PREPARING FOR YOUR BAPTISM:**

We want the process to be as smooth as possible, so here are some things you'll want to know prior to your baptism.

### **What to bring:**

- Towel
- Flip flops/sandals
- Dark shorts
- Change of clothes
- Hair dryer/styling products (if desired)
- A CedarCreek shirt will be provided for you

### **What to do:**

- Complete the Baptism Bible Study (it's in your hands)
- Sign up for baptism at [CedarCreek.tv/baptism](https://CedarCreek.tv/baptism) (Baptism takes place after the weekend services the first month of every weekend at your Campus.)

### **Where to go (for more information):**

- Guest Services at your Campus
- Email [Baptism@CedarCreek.tv](mailto:Baptism@CedarCreek.tv)

After your baptism, we would love to help you take your next step with Jesus. Here are some next steps to consider:

**Bible Study:** Learn more about God and develop your faith by engaging in daily Bible study and Bible reading. Our weekly LivingItOut Bible study is a short daily activity that reinforces the weekend teaching and dives deeper into scripture. You can go to **LivingItOut.tv** to sign up for daily e-mail delivery, or access it on our CedarCreek app.

**GrowthTrack:** The principles covered in GrowthTrack will help you take your next step on the journey to discover your unique gifting and purpose. For GrowthTrack information and times at your Campus, go to **CedarCreek.tv/GrowthTrack**.

**Groups:** Join a Group. God created us to live in community and develop meaningful relationships with others. At CedarCreek, we have a variety of Groups that you can join to live out your faith to the fullest with others! To learn more about Groups, stop by Guest Services at your Campus or check online at **CedarCreek.tv/groups**.

If you have any questions about how you can take your next step, please email **Baptism@CedarCreek.tv**, or talk to your Campus Staff.

# STUDENTS AND CHILDREN

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## **CEDARCREEKSTUDENTS (6th-12th grade):**

If you have made the decision to be baptized, congratulations! We are so excited for you. We would love the chance to connect with you (if we aren't already connected) and celebrate with you! We want to encourage you to reach out to your Campus Students Director so that we can come alongside you for this awesome moment.

## **CEDARCREEKKIDS (5th grade and younger):**

Do you have a child who is interested in baptism? How exciting! Please connect with the Kids Director at your Campus. They will provide you with the "NextStep" book, which will walk your child through the foundations of salvation and baptism, in addition to other biblical principles. This resource will also provide you with helpful language as you continue to support your child's spiritual growth. We are honored to partner with you!

# INFANT BAPTISM

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## WHY DOESN'T CEDARCREEK BAPTIZE INFANTS?

In the Bible, we don't see specific examples of infants and small children being baptized. What you will find are examples of people consciously placing their faith and trust in Jesus. You then see them making the significant outward gesture (baptism) acknowledging their inward transformation (salvation) which happened the moment they trusted Jesus to lead their lives. This decision has consequences that a baby or even a small child cannot comprehend. It sets a new direction for your life. It is critically important that each person make this decision for themselves. As we read in Acts 2:38, **“Peter replied, ‘Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”**

So at what age should one be baptized? Children should be old enough to understand that they have done things that are sinful (i.e. disobeyed parents, gotten angry with siblings, taken things which don't belong to them, etc.). They should understand that because of Jesus, those things are forgiven in God's eyes – even though there may be consequences here!). They should understand that Jesus is their “forever friend,” but also have a sense that he is more than that—that he now tells them how to live their lives in obedience to the book he has given us, the Bible. He is our leader and Lord. Sometimes it is best to speak with your child's Kids Director for an accurate assessment of their understanding of these ideas. Don't worry!

Again, your child's salvation does NOT depend on their being baptized. It depends solely on their relationship with Jesus Christ. If they are too young and unable to understand, our Heavenly Father knows that.

### **IF I WAS BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT, SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED AGAIN?**

Many people who come to CedarCreek from different faith backgrounds struggle with the biblical teaching that says you should be baptized when you have personally trusted Christ for the forgiveness of your sin. As stated above, a baby or young child cannot make that decision on their own. Many times people want to honor their family's decision to have them baptized as infants. They have concern that this baptism would disrespect their infant baptism. However, this may be an opportunity to gently point out what the Bible actually says about baptism, and to illustrate the change that has occurred in their hearts. If your parents had you baptized as an infant or young child, the Bible says that when you decide for yourself that Jesus will be the Lord and leader of your life, you should be baptized as a public confession of that decision.

If you have any more questions, please email [\*\*Baptism@CedarCreek.tv\*\*](mailto:Baptism@CedarCreek.tv).