



## **“Saved Before or After Baptism?”**

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At what point is a penitent sinner saved from past sins? That question has long divided professing Christians. Most people who claim to follow Jesus believe that baptism is to play some part in a believer’s life. But, what part? Is baptism merely a symbolic ceremony performed upon new Christians? Or is it the point at which one is forgiven of sins by the blood of Christ? If the latter be the case, wouldn’t that make it a necessary step of obedience in order to be saved?

What about you? Do you believe that you were saved before you were baptized, because that’s really what the question comes down to. We’ll look at a passage of scripture in Paul’s letter to the church at Rome about the wonderful transformation that takes place in the heart of a sinner who comes to the Lord Jesus.

**Romans 6:16-18 “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”**

It should go without saying that in order to be saved and to be reconciled to God, we need to have our sins removed. God is holy; He can have no fellowship with sin. Our sins are what has separated us from God to begin with. So, salvation is about having our sins forgiven; *being made free from sin*. But how? By the blood of Jesus? Of course. By the death of Jesus? Of course. By the grace of God? Of course. But at what point are our sins taken away? When does the sinner move from the state of sin to the state of salvation? It really isn’t a mystery because Paul declares it very plainly in our text. We’ll search the scriptures to find the answers to these questions.

The Bible is clear that the sinner **MUST** be forgiven of his sins in order to be saved. As we said, God is holy and just, and cannot have fellowship with sin.

**Isaiah 59:1-2** “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

The sinner is spiritually dead, facing the second and eternal death if he remains in his sins.

**Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death...”

So, to be *saved from sin* means to be *forgiven of sin*; to be *forgiven of sin* means to be *freed from sin*. The only way we can be free from sin is by coming to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing from those sins.

**John 8:36** “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

The question is, how do we come to Jesus? What does it mean to be washed in His blood? At what point are we forgiven and thus, free from sin’s fetters? When you find the answers to these questions, you also learn at what point a man is saved in Christ, because no man can be saved until he is free from the bondage and guilt of sin. That freedom is only by the grace of a merciful God; not based on any worth or merit of our own.

**Ephesians 2:8** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:”

But there must be a point at which a man is no longer in sin, but rather declared righteous and free from the sins of his past. When is that? When is a man made free from sin?

**Romans 6:17-18** “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Consider that word “*then*.” That point of transition. What is Paul talking about? Someone will say that a man is made free from sin the moment he believes in Christ. Is that what Paul is referring to? Look again at **verse 17**. Did he say *...ye were the servants of sin, but ye have believed in your heart that form of doctrine being then made free from sin...*? Is that what Paul said? No, you won’t find the word *believe* there. Belief is the cause of what Paul is talking about. We certainly can’t be saved without believing in Jesus. In fact, Jesus Himself said:

**John 8:24** “... for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

Faith is essential. But is it all there is? Are we then made free from sin when we believe?

**James 2:19** “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

You see, the devils believe the truth; they just don’t submit to it. Paul preached before sinful King Agrippa and in his persuasive appeal to the king, he asked him if he believed.

**Acts 26:27-28** “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

The word *believe* can be used in different degrees. It can simply mean *to assent to a fact*. More comprehensively, it means *to yield to the one believed*. There's an interesting sentence construction in **Mark 16:16** where Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples.

**Mark 16:15-16** “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Notice that belief and baptism are made conditions by our Lord for salvation. Someone in protest might say, *why didn't Jesus say that he who believeth not AND is not baptized shall be condemned?* Friend, it's simply because belief envelopes the obedience that results from it. In other words, baptism is the immediate manifestation of belief. Jesus didn't have to include both in the last phrase because baptism would avail nothing to the man who doesn't believe. As one man said, regarding an unbeliever and baptism, *he couldn't if he would, he wouldn't if he could, and it wouldn't do him any good if he did*. So, yes, we must believe Jesus in order to be saved, but becoming free from sin doesn't occur when one merely assents mentally to the gospel.

Someone else might say that they believe they were made free from sin when they said *the sinner's prayer*. Let's look again at **Romans 6:17**.

**Romans 6:17** “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”

Did Paul say, “*but ye have prayed from your heart, being then made free from sin...*”? No, that's not what he said either. In fact, you have never read where one person responded to the preaching of the gospel by reciting anything that the Bible calls “The Sinner's Prayer.” You know, friend, there is no such thing in the New Covenant. There's not one single example of gospel conversion recorded in the book of Acts that says that any person was ever told to pray a prayer to receive salvation, to become a Christian or to be made free from sin. Those who ARE Christians are told to pray for the forgiveness of their sins, but the sinner outside of Christ is never told to do so, and there is not one example of anyone saying such a prayer in order to be saved after Jesus Christ came and died upon the cross and offered salvation to the world. That is simply not what Paul said in **Romans 6:17**. Perhaps you were told by a preacher or by someone else that to come to Jesus, you simply need to accept Christ into your heart by saying such a prayer. But look again at our text, and we'll let Paul explain what he means.

**Romans 6:16-18** “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Paul makes the delineation not at the point of mere belief, but at the point of obedience. He said they had “*obeyed from the heart...being then made free from sin...*” Most preachers today will tell you that salvation comes first, then comes obedience, but Paul stated it the other way around. He says that you obey, then you are made free from sin and become servants of righteousness. That's in harmony with what he wrote in **Hebrews 5:9** as well.

**Hebrews 5:9** “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;”

Now we don't earn anything in obedience; don't mistake the point. But the Lord has made gospel obedience the *condition* of receiving the gift of salvation. Any gift must be received, and we receive Christ's gift in faith that is manifest in obedience. We obey the form of doctrine delivered, as Paul says, and then become free from sin. Remember too, that becoming free from sin is not something that comes after salvation. It must happen in order for salvation to take place, and we're made free by the efficacious sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His blood that was shed on Calvary. But that gift is received at the point where we *obey from the heart the form of doctrine* that Paul is talking about.

That begs the question, what is that *form of doctrine* to which Paul refers? He uses the word *obey*, so we know it's something we submit to, not merely believe or mentally assent to. It isn't something we get or receive in our hearts. He says that it's something that we DO from the heart. It's an action of obedience. He also says that that act of obedience is not a mere ritual, but a response of faith and repentance, a conscious decision from the heart. (That's why the notion that babies are born in sin and must be baptized to be saved is wrong. An infant can't do anything from the heart or from an understanding and willing mind.) Paul says freedom from sin comes when we obey and submit from the heart to *that form of doctrine which was delivered you*. What is a *form*? We talk about a form when we pour concrete. You prepare your site and dig footers as you prepare a form. You pour concrete into that form, and a concrete slab takes on the shape, dimensions and depth of the form. If you bake a cake, you mix the batter and pour it into a pan, and it comes out looking exactly like the pan that you baked it in. So, you see, Paul is talking about a *mold* or *likeness*. The renowned New Testament scholar James MacKnight said in his commentary of this verse:

A *form* (*tupos* in the Greek) is "a mold into which melted metals are poured to receive the form of the mold."  
(from [MacKnight On The Epistles](#))

That's interesting because you might say that faith and repentance are produced by gospel conviction, and that melts one's heart or spirit so that it might be poured into God's mold/form and made into what God desires of it. That's a powerful illustration that Paul uses here: We are poured into the mold/form of the doctrine.

So what's the *doctrine* Paul speaks of? He says it was *delivered you*. It merely refers to *the teaching delivered to them*. Here's what he said to the church at Corinth:

**I Corinthians 15:1-4 "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also now received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:"**

He says, "*the gospel that you received...the gospel wherein ye stand...the gospel by which ye are saved...*" That gospel, that teaching, was the fact that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and arose again the third day. Is that not the very crux of the gospel? Paul said that it is.

Let's try that on. Back to **Romans 6:17**.

**Romans 6:17-18 "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."**

When were they made free from sin? When were they saved? When they obeyed the gospel. What did these Roman converts obey that was in the form/mold/likeness of the gospel--the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus? Did they say a prayer in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection? Did they merely believe in the likeness of His death, burial and resurrection? Look back at **Romans 6:3-5**.

**Romans 6:3-5 “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: “**

There it is! These believers DIED to their sins in baptism, they were BURIED with Jesus in baptism, and they ROSE from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life! Planted in the likeness of HIS death and HIS resurrection. Friend, that means that baptism is much more than just ‘an outward show’ of a past inward transaction. Paul didn’t say that we were planted in the likeness of our death and our resurrection from sin, but His death and His resurrection. In other words, raised from baptism to a new life. Baptism is something besides a church ordinance for people who have already been saved or freed from sin. Paul says they obeyed from the heart that likeness of the gospel, or the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, being then made free from sin.

That helps us to understand a number of other statements made in the book of Acts. Remember in **Acts 22**, Saul of Tarsus had met Jesus on the Damascus road and had been told to go into the city. He, having been made blind, waited there for the preacher Ananias that Jesus said would come to him, to restore his sight and tell him what to do to be saved. You recall what Ananias told him? Paul recounted it in **verse 16**.

**Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”**

You say, *surely the literal water in baptism doesn’t wash our sins away?* Oh no, the blood of Jesus is the only thing that washes our sins away. But the question is, where was that blood shed?

**John 19:33-34 “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.”**

His blood was poured out in His death. So, where does Paul say that we unite with His death? In our death to sin, which takes place in baptism. That helps us to understand why Peter said this, in **Acts 2:38**:

**Acts 2:38 “...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...”**

*For*, meaning *in order to receive or obtain*. *Remission*, meaning *forgiveness*. This helps us to see why every single conversion recorded in the New Testament after Christ died and rose again and the gospel was preached included the believer *immediately* being baptized for the remission of their sins. You see, you can’t be saved and remain in your sins; your sins must be removed. You must be liberated from the bondage of sin in order to be saved. You must be in Christ in order to be free from sin and thus, saved. Paul so beautifully tells us when and how that is done. When, in faith, the penitent heart is united with

Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection in baptism for the remission of sins. That's exactly what the people on the Day of Pentecost did.

**Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."**

That means baptism is not an option. It's not an auxiliary command or suggestion; it is an absolute command to every penitent believer. **Verse 41** tells us that those who gladly received his word WERE baptized, and they were then added to the church.

We come to **Acts 8**, when the Ethiopian nobleman who was riding along in his chariot and reading from the scroll of **Isaiah** met Philip the evangelist, and Philip took that scroll and showed him how it referred to Jesus and led him to salvation. You remember that the eunuch saw an oasis of water there along the way and he said,

**Acts 8:36-39 "...See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."**

That's why we also read in that same chapter how that Simon and the people of Samaria, upon hearing and believing the gospel or good news of the kingdom that Philip preached, were baptized. And on and on we could go, to the house of Cornelius in **Acts 10**. To the Philippian jailer in **Acts 16**, when he was holding Paul and Silas in prison and during the midnight hour as they were singing and praying, an angel opened the doors of the prison. All of the prisoners could've escaped, but they didn't, and the jailer was amazed.

**Acts 16:27-33 "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway."**

You can go all the way through the book of **Acts**, and every example of conversion includes sinners being baptized in order to have their sins remitted. It was done immediately when they came to the point of believing that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and they were willing to turn away from their sins.

Have you done that? Have you been baptized into Christ? Let me be even more specific: Do you believe that you were saved BEFORE being baptized in obedience to Christ? That's what most churches and most preachers will lead you to believe. But, does that fit with what Paul was saying in our text? Have you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, being then made free from sin? I'd like to urge you to obey the Lord in baptism for the remission of your sins. I'd like to urge you to turn away from your sins

in faith and repentance and be willing to confess that Jesus is who He claims to be—the Christ, the Son of God—and be baptized in order to have your sins washed away. That will put you into Christ.

**Galatians 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”**

Can a person be saved outside of Christ? No, we must be IN Christ. The Bible says we are *baptized into Christ*. When we’re baptized into Christ, we put on Christ; we enter into a relationship with Him. Having been made free from sin, made a new creation in Christ. Baptism doesn’t merely picture the fact that at some point in the past we became a new creation. Rather, it IS the point at which we become a new creation.

The Bible places a greater emphasis on baptism than most people in the religious world place upon it today. I’d like to urge you to give serious consideration to what the Bible does indeed say about baptism, and I hope that you will hasten to obey the Lord in the way that the Lord gave this commandment. For the reason which He gave the commandment. That you’ll be baptized and have your sins washed away. You’ll enter into Christ with a new life, to be a member of Christ’s church and serve Him as long as you live.

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