

I then responded, "This is the commandment of Jesus, **'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'** (Mathew 28:19). To show us its vital importance, He says, **'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'** (Mark 16:16).

Salvation is saving us from the punishment of death. Christ died for all, but those who wish to obtain salvation must be baptized into His death. As St. Paul says, **'do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life'** (Romans 6:3-4).

Therefore, we gain salvation through baptism as we are baptized into His death to get remission of sins and we rise from baptism with newness of life. St. Paul mentioned the same meaning when he said, **'buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead'** (Colossians 2:12)."

While I was speaking to Jessica, I shared with her that I had visited some very old Christian churches, wherein I saw places of baptism, "I had actually visited baptismal fonts that were dated back to the fifth century. Baptism was the first step to becoming a Christian in the early Church, as we saw in the above examples. **A person should start his/her Christian life by being baptized with water.**"

"Now I understand what happens in baptism, but how could water grant people remission of sins and new life?" Jessica asked.

I answered, "The early Church used prayers to consecrate the water of baptism. So, the water is

no longer ordinary water, but one that has the power of granting a person remission of sins and a new birth. This is done by the work of the Holy Spirit on the water of baptism to consecrate it and give it the power of creation so that every person that gets baptized will be a new creature in Christ, as St. Paul says, **'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new'** (2 Corinthians 5:17). St. Paul summarized what happens in baptism by saying, **'according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit'** (Titus 3:5).

As in the story of creation, **'the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters'** (Genesis 1:2) to create life, so the Spirit of God works on the water of baptism to create newness of life."

I continued to say, "Sometime ago, I compared the baptism prayers of the fifth century and the one used now by the Coptic Orthodox Church and found that it matched almost word to word. So, the Coptic Church still has the same prayers that consecrate the water."

"This is amazing! The Coptic Orthodox Church is still using the same prayers that were used in baptism by the early Church," Jessica commented.

"The Orthodox Church is a traditional church, which means it keeps the faith, the teachings and the worship with all of its prayers exactly as they had been handed down," I said.

"Thank you for explaining an important topic related to my salvation," Jessica said ending our dialogue.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4: 5-6).

Why ?

Do I Need Baptism If I've Been Saved

By Victor Beshir



Jessica came to me to ask about "baptism," a topic we started talking about last week. She opened her Bible to John 3:5-6, **"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"**

Then she said, "I examined the above verses that you asked me to read and I do not see baptism. Jesus talks about being born of water and Spirit, and then He refers to the water as the birth of the flesh and to the spirit as the birth of the Spirit." She continued to say, "I believe in the salvation of the Lord, even though I have not heard about baptism through water. Are there other references to baptism in the Bible?"

I answered, "How about the declaration of our Lord? **'He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned'** (Mark 16:16). If you notice, He is combining two acts together: "faith" and "baptism" by making them conditions for salvation. Without these, a person is condemned."

"All of the churches I've attended interpret baptism as a spiritual birth, not a birth of water," Jessica said.

"Today, we have hundreds of Christian denominations in the USA; all proclaiming they follow the Bibles' teachings. Yet, each interprets the Bible differently. If they all followed the Bible, we would never have ended up with hundreds of denominations," I said.

"That means there are differences between those churches," she commented.

"You're right. The best way to find the truth is to go back to the early Church when the Church was one Church throughout the whole world. One practical and easy solution is to examine the book of Acts in the New Testament to see how the apostles of Christ applied what they had learned from the Lord," I said.

I thought about her question and said, "Going back to baptism, let's examine what happened after Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost: **'Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'**

Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2: 37-38). Here the people were desperate for salvation as they asked Peter and the rest of the apostles. The answer was two steps: 1) to repent and 2) to be baptized."

I stopped for a moment, and then I said, "If baptism brought no salvation, the apostles would have said something different!"

"They said baptism, but they did not mention water here," she commented.

I then told her that the text continues on to say: **"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"** (Acts 2:41).

I said, "Please notice that the people did not wait long after hearing Peter's message, but once they heard about the need to get baptized, they immediately accepted it and were baptized. Let's examine another example from the early Church. Philip talked to the Ethiopian eunuch about Christ. The Bible states: **'Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'**

Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him' (Acts 8:36-38)."

"Here we see two steps: there is a declaration of faith given that is then immediately followed by baptism with water. In fact, faith is a condition of receiving baptism.

Therefore faith alone is not enough and it should be followed by baptism with water," I explained.

Jessica started to see the big difference between what she had previously heard and the practice of the early Church as it was recorded in the book of Acts.

She then asked, "How will God judge those who were not baptized because their churches did not instruct them on baptism?"

"I'm not here to judge anybody, that's God's role. What God will do or how He will judge is up to Him. Christ clearly shows us the way of salvation and His apostles practiced it. The Church throughout the whole world followed the same truth, baptism with water as an essential step for salvation, for 1600 years. In fact, until now the Orthodox Church still practices baptism by emersion into water, as was mentioned about Philip and the Ethiopian. Now that we know the truth are we going to gladly accept baptism, as the people did when they heard the answer of St. Peter? We will have no excuses if we neglect it.

Another example of baptism in the early Church is in the book of Acts. Paul & Silas were imprisoned in Philippi when the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison. As the keeper of the prison saw the doors open, he tried to kill himself. Paul told him that nobody escaped. The man realizing the divine power worked with Paul and Silas then asked them:

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"
So they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. **And immediately he and all his family were baptized"** (Acts 16: 29-33).

"I see the practice of the early Church that reflects the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. What I do not understand is why baptism is so important," Jessica pondered.