

WHY ARE YOU WAITING?

Immediately upon his conversion, Ananias told Paul, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16).

Understand that at this point Jesus had already shared the gospel of grace with Paul on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 26:18; Gal. 1:12). And then understand that Ananias says that the core essence of Paul’s gospel ministry would relate to the Christ he had already seen and what he had already heard from Him.

Now Ananias is addressing **other things** that Christ did not tell Paul, but rather said he would be told in Damascus that which he is appointed to do (Acts 22:10). And one of those things is the issue of baptism.

So, note that a careful study makes a distinction between the gospel as shared by Christ personally with Paul and baptism, which follows, which was shared by Ananias. Paul in Galatians 1 makes a MAJOR point of the fact that he received the gospel directly from Christ ALONE and no one else (Gal. 1:11-12). The reason this is so important is that many people claim that baptism is part of salvation, and they appeal to Acts 22:16 as a key proof. This teaching is known as “baptismal regeneration”.

Many refer to baptism as a sacrament, meaning that this ritual itself is the means by which a person receives the saving grace of God. This is false doctrine, and the reason it is so serious is that to trust in baptism, even a little bit, for salvation means you are not trusting in Jesus Christ alone. Saving faith trusts in Christ 100% alone for salvation and does not rely on any works that we do, including baptism.

Romans 4:4-5 (NKJV)

4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.
5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

There are a few verses in the New Testament that, if taken in isolation, are confusing concerning the issue of baptism. That is why we study the Bible inductively, considering the whole counsel of God. If you have 3 or 4 verses that seem out of sync with the rest of the Bible, then maybe you should back up and think, perhaps I am missing something.

A solid principle of proper interpretation is that a clear text always takes precedence over an unclear text. We have about 150 clear verses in the

NT that teach we are saved on the basis of FAITH ALONE, in contrast to a few hard-to-understand ones that on the surface might seem to tie water baptism into it.

Years ago, I wrote a series of articles in the newspaper exposing the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration. It caused quite a stir among those who teach it. I got together with one of them at his insistence. He said I was a deceiver, and he wanted to come to our church and debate me in front of our church. Since I don't give false teachers a platform, I rejected that out of hand. However, at the end of the day, we did agree on one point. One of us is WRONG! We both agreed that it can't be both ways. Either we are saved by faith alone, or we are saved by faith plus baptism.

I am absolutely dogmatic and emphatic that the Bible teaches salvation by faith alone! This is a HILL TO DIE ON!

Read the gospel of John – the gospel of belief. We don't even have NT church baptism in the book. John wrote this book well into the Church Age (c. A.D. 90) so we might believe and have eternal life. If baptism is involved in saving a person, John the apostle left out a key part of the salvation message in a book that has as its entire PURPOSE to show people how to get saved (cf. Jn. 20:30-31). Did John leave out an essential element? That is impossible for me to believe!

In Acts 22:16, Ananias begins by saying: “***And now why are you waiting?***” This is like a little swift kick that Paul should immediately do this, that is, he should immediately get baptized. After you believe it is the next step, there is to be no delay. If you are a believer and have not been baptized, Ananias would say to you: “***And now why are you waiting?***” That is a great question. You shouldn't be waiting. You should get up and get baptized. Why are you waiting?

The word “baptize” literally means “to immerse,” but has the meaning of IDENTIFICATION. The key idea behind baptism is always one of IDENTIFICATION. Baptism, then, is an outward ritual that symbolizes union with Christ. It doesn't make the union a reality, it simply testifies to it.

As for the rest of the verse (Acts 22:16), an understanding of the Greek is helpful here, but it is still complicated, and at the end of the day, our theology is determined by a full-orbed inductive study of Scripture and not by one obscure verse in isolation. In Acts 22:16, the aorist tense is in view. This denotes FACT of action without necessarily telling TIME of action, although it often refers to PAST action.

In the Greek, there are two separate but related thoughts in Acts 22:16. Grammatically, “Arise” goes together with “***and be baptized***”. And “***wash away your sins***” goes together with “***calling on the name of the Lord***”. There are two separate verbs connected with two separate participles, but they are connected with the word “and”.

The Structure of Acts 22:16

Having arisen (aorist participle) be baptized (verb),

and

wash away your sins (verb), having called on the name of the Lord (aorist participle).

Just as “having arisen” goes with “be baptized”; so “and wash away your sins” goes with “calling on the name of the Lord.” Just as “having arisen” precedes being baptized so “calling on the name of the Lord” precedes the washing away of sins.

In Acts 22:16 the Greek is complicated for a reason. Two related but distinct associations are being made. Note that “and wash away your sins” is grammatically connected to “calling on the name of the Lord.” However, because baptism illustrates this cleansing it is closely connected with it in the flow of thought. How do you show that washing away of sins is on the basis of calling on the name of the Lord and yet illustrated in water baptism? Well, just exactly like it is nuanced in Acts 22:16. The distinctions of reality are made, and yet the close symbolic association is also maintained.

Therefore the sense of Acts 22:16 is this: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins (metaphorically), having already called on the name of the Lord for salvation.”

When you put all the Scriptures together in an inductive way the only sense “washed” can be understood in connection with baptism is symbolically. Water baptism does symbolically picture sins being washed away as seen for example in 1 Peter 3:21.

This is why the New Testament emphasizes baptism IMMEDIATELY following salvation. At the MOMENT one believes in Christ, they are completely cleansed of all sin (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 1:5). If they wait ten years to get baptized, that communicates the wrong message. That is like saying, although I have been saved for years, yet I haven’t been

cleansed until now. The appropriate time to declare cleansing is right when it happens. It is an immediate reality! Baptism is saying I have believed and therefore I am cleansed of all sin RIGHT NOW. This is the consistent pattern in the New Testament – people believed and were then immediately baptized.

Baptism does portray cleansing, but as we see in a multitude of clear passages, salvation cleansing is on the basis of faith alone. In reality, it is the blood of Jesus alone that cleanses from all sin, and it is faith alone that applies it to the heart (cf. 1 Jn. 1:7, Rev. 1:5, Acts 15:9).

Acts 15:9 (NKJV)

9 “and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

In Romans 10:13 Paul is emphatic that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (cf. Acts 2:21). Baptism doesn’t change our state, but it does state our change. It is an outward testimony of an inward reality.