

CHAPTER 4

BAPTISM & SALVATION

I Cor. 2:9 (NIV)

However, as it is written: no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

Almost all religious groups firmly believe in some form of afterlife. Most accept that we have the opportunity of living forever in the presence of God, in His heavenly kingdom (see Chapter-8, The Kingdom). In the Bible, this opportunity is called 'salvation.'

The central issue here, is "How does one obtain this salvation?" The way to salvation differs among denominations. *However, it should be the same for all.* God has established only one way to salvation. Human misperceptions and errors propagated over the centuries have led to the present state of disarray among the so-called Christian groups, concerning this matter of salvation.

Here, independent of any denominational precepts, the Biblical plan for salvation is presented. With that done, the main sources of disagreement between the scriptural plan for salvation and those plans presented by the denominations is discussed. The primary area of disagreement is on the necessity for baptism as a part of God's only given plan for salvation.

THE BIBLICAL PLAN FOR SALVATION

God has provided salvation to us as a free gift. There's nothing we can do to earn this gift. Indeed, if we could earn it, then it wouldn't be a gift;

Rom. 6:23 (NIV, my underlining)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is Eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph. 2:8-9 (NIV, my underlining)

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not
by works, so that no one can boast.*

So, salvation is from God's graciousness, and is offered free as a gift. Mankind cannot earn it, and in fact does not even deserve it.

Well, if it is free, then do we have an open door to salvation? Is salvation independent of how we think and whatever we do while we live here on earth? If all you look at are these two verses, you might conclude that we can get away with anything we want. We can conduct ourselves in any manner, and still get a free pass to salvation. You cannot, however, ignore all the rest of the scriptures that bear on the subject.

While salvation is offered as a free gift, we still must reach out to accept it. It's no different from a father offering his child a lollypop. The child must reach out to receive it. Similarly, the Scriptures teach that we too, must reach out for this gift from God. This 'reaching out' is accomplished by our believing that Jesus is our Savior; our having faith that Jesus made the payment for our sins and that God will save us because that sacrifice is acceptable to Him, our having repented from the sin within our lives, our having confessed to mankind the nature of Jesus and His sacrifice for us; and our having been baptized to bury our old sinful nature, rising up a new, acceptable person. God has specified that *each* of these are important- and so each one is necessary for us to obtain His salvation. If we leave out any one or more of them, then we have not accepted God's plan of salvation for mankind. That omission makes us lost in our sins.

Let's see how God tells us of our need to reach out in each of the ways.

BELIEVE

Here's why reaching out with belief is a NECESSARY part of obtaining salvation. Without belief, we cannot get God's free gift;

John 3:16 (NIV; my underlining)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 11:25-26 (NIV; my underlining)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Acts 16:30-31 (NIV; my underlining)

..... Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They replied, "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved- you and your household."

Heb. 10:39 (NIV; my underlining)

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

But God requires more than just belief in His Word.

FAITH

Faith is like belief, but its implications are stronger than belief. Faith is knowing something is real, even though you cannot feel it or see it;

Heb. 11:1 (NIV)

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Here's why reaching out with faith is a NECESSARY part of obtaining salvation. Without faith, we cannot get God's free gift (my underlining);

I Tim. 3:15 (NIV)

..... and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

I Pet. 1:8-9 (NIV)

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Eph. 2:8 (NIV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.....

But just like belief, faith also does not stand alone;

Jas. 2:24 (NIV)

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

REPENTANCE

Repentance is being truly remorseful or sorry for our sins, and turning away from them. Here's why reaching out with repentance is a NECESSARY part of obtaining salvation. Without repentance, we cannot get God's free gift (my underlining);

Acts 3:19 (NIV)

Repent then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.....

Luke 15:7 (NIV)

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Luke 13:3 (NIV)

..... But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

In this last verse, we have to understand the word 'perish' within the context intended for it. Thayer's Greek Lexicon (Reference-12, #622) elaborates on the intended meaning of this word. As 'perish' is used in Luke 13:3, Thayer says;

".... To devote or give over to eternal misery."

People normally call this 'spiritual' death, in contrast to 'physical' death.

CONFESSION

Confession in the scriptures does not refer to pouring out an admission of one's sins to a priest, or minister, or congregation. Scripturally, it means to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the source of our salvation. The acknowledgement is to anyone needing to hear the gospel (the good news). Here's how reaching out with confession is a NECESSARY part of obtaining salvation. Without confession, we cannot get God's free gift (my underlining);

Luke 12:8 (NIV)

I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.

I John 4:14-15 (NIV)

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

Rom. 10:10 (NIV)

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess, and are saved.

Thayer (Reference-12, #3670) also gives us some information about the meaning of confession as it is used in these verses;

"to profess..... that of which he is convinced and which he holds to be true."

So acknowledging Christ and being willing to express the substance of the good news (the gospel) is the essence of this confession.

BAPTISM

Several baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament. They are used for different purposes. They are used at various times, both before and after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Immersion in water is the baptism used by the early church, and that is the baptism required by God for salvation. We'll go into scriptures that will verify this crucial point. The vast majority of religious denominations consider water baptism to be a *symbol* of our having already been saved. Yet the scriptures speak contrarily

and definitively that baptism is a NECESASARY part of our reaching out to obtain God's free gift of salvation (my underlining);

Rom. 6:3-5 & 3:11 (NIV)

..... Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection..... In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:27 (NIV)

..... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

I Pet. 3:20-22 (NIV)

..... God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it 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 [response] of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ..

Acts 2:38 & 2:41 (NIV)

..... "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

..... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

By far most denominations do not teach that this last requirement for reaching out, is a NECESSARY one for obtaining salvation. Those groups provide a wide spectrum of reasons for taking that stand. In each case however, their position is not on firm scriptural ground. We'll be looking at some of their indefensible positions.

At this point though, something needs to be done to congeal these scriptures specifying *belief, faith, repentance, confession, AND baptism* as the way we reach out to obtain God's salvation. Far too many people will hear or read a single, isolated verse like John 3:16. They'll try to follow its one requirement (belief) and consequently feel falsely confident that salvation is theirs.

John 3:16 (NIV; my underlining)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

People seeking the truth are often taught this by a minister, or by some other person they have come to trust. I'm sure that God foresaw this problem might develop. So, He included within His scriptures, a number of verses that connect *TWO* at a time, all of his requirements for salvation. In this way, anyone studying the scriptures for truth, will realize that *ALL* (not some) of the ways for reaching out for the gift, are required. In the following scriptures, God has interlaced his requirements for reaching out to receive salvation (my underlining);

Here, the need to repent and to believe are combined;

Mark 1:15 (NIV)

..... Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Here, the need for faith and for belief are combined;

Heb. 11:6 (NIV)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Here, the need for belief and for confession are combined;

Rom. 10:9 (NIV)

..... That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Here, the need for faith and repentance are combined;

Acts 20:21 (NIV)

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

Here, the need for repentance and baptism are combined;

Acts 2:38 (NIV)

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Here, the need for belief and baptism are combined;

Mark 16:16 (NIV)

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,
but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*

These people were addressed under varying conditions and circumstances. God told the different people what they needed to hear at that moment, about 'reaching out' for salvation. Most definitely, there is only way for each of these Scriptures to be true. That is for *ALL* of them to be equally true. Baptism then, cannot be excluded from our reaching out for the free gift of salvation.

Don't however, look upon these things as a checklist. One should not strive to believe, then strive for faith, and so on.... Instead, look upon them as five equal ingredients being stirred in a pot. The only way for the matter to come out right is for all the ingredients to be in the pot, with not one of them left out. This being the case then, baptism (the ingredient most-often left out by the denominations) is indeed, essential to achieve God's gift of eternal life.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM & WHY THEY FAIL

Why do so many religious groups deny the necessity of baptism for salvation? Virtually all denominations use baptism as one or another of their rituals. Few, however, teach that it is as essential as belief, confession, repentance, and faith. Their reasons for excluding baptism are numerous. Yet no reason stands up under thorough scrutiny of the Scriptures.

What follows is an aggregate of conversations I've had with various representatives of these religious groups. The discussions bring out the points they claim as valid proof of their stand against the necessity of baptism for salvation. Following that are the scriptural reasons I used to show them why their arguments are not compatible with God's Word.

VISITOR:

Look at Mark 16:16;

Mark 16:16 (NIV)

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

If baptism is necessary for salvation then the last half of the verse would have read like this;

..... but whoever does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned.

ME:

Studying the scriptures is fruitless without applying a measure of common sense. In Mark 16:16, if a person does not believe in God and His Son then that person is already condemned. What good would baptism do for such a person? There's no need for a baptism because the 'old self' would not be changed in the baptism of an unbeliever. Mark 16:16 makes perfect and complete sense just as it is written.

VISITOR:

But baptism is a 'work' and we are not justified by our works.... So baptism isn't necessary to be saved.

ME:

I've shown you a series of scriptures that establish the necessity of baptism for salvation. This point you make..... can you support it with scriptures? Without a scriptural basis, the point you're trying to make is just conjecture..... or opinion. We need to avoid the confrontational mindset where one opinion is pitted against another. That's why I try to support what I'm telling you, with definitive scripture on the subject.

For a moment though, let's accept your premise that baptism is a 'work.' If so, then one could equally well, argue that repentance is a 'work.' Do you also deny that repentance is necessary before salvation is obtained? After all, repentance has an active component (work). Namely, you have to exert yourself (works) to turn from your sins..... remember that you have to make things right as you repent. So by your premise, neither repentance nor

baptism is needed to be saved. I know that your group accepts the need for repentance, so you have to accept the necessity of baptism as well.

VISITOR:

I saw your quote of John 3:16. That verse is emphatically clear! Salvation is directly and singularly tied only to believing. Go to almost any football game and see signs in the stands pointing to John 3:16 as the guide to salvation.

ME:

Couldn't one say the same thing about Luke 13:5 ? In that case, salvation is singularly tied to repentance.

How about Rom. 10:10 ? There, salvation is tied only to belief and confession. Should we accept only belief and confession and exclude faith? No, we include faith because other scriptures point to it. The same is unavoidably true for baptism. So we don't exclude the necessity for baptism, simply because it is not mentioned in Rom. 10:10.

The most correct thing we can do is to take all the verses in all their circumstances to conclude what God's intentions are concerning salvation.

VISITOR:

The apostle Paul himself, played down the importance of baptism. Take a look at I Cor. 1:14, where Paul implies that baptism has little significance;

*I Cor. 1:14 (NIV)
..... I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you.*

Surely, if Paul thought baptism was necessary for salvation, he wouldn't have said that!

ME:

I have two thoughts about the verse you just read. First, the context of Paul's statement is not made clear in what you just quoted. Read all of that chapter. It shows that Paul was not de-emphasizing the role of baptism in salvation. Instead, he was dealing with contentions within the congregation at Corinth; some people there, thought they were better- or more important than others, simply based on the stature of the one who had baptized them. It's only within that context that Paul made the declaration you quoted. His statement had nothing to do with salvation.

An equally important point is this.... In the Bible there's never an indication that the person doing the baptizing has any significance in the process at all. It doesn't matter *WHO* holds and immerses you in the water of baptism.

VISITOR:

Baptism is a *symbol* of our having already obtained salvation. We become saved based on scriptures like John 3:16. Then as a demonstration of our faith and salvation, we get baptized. The scriptures teach as much in I Pet. 3:20 and 3:21. There, baptism is specifically identified as a symbol.

ME:

I agree that the words 'baptism' and 'symbolize' both appear in those scriptures. But there's no contextual way to get these words together in such a way that 'baptism' becomes a symbol of anything. By thoroughly reviewing the verses, the symbol is seen to be the water.... not the baptism. Peter is making a comparison of the way that the baptismal water saves us today, and the way that the water of the Great Flood saved Noah's family. See for yourself that baptism is not the symbol, but the water is;

I Pet. 3:20-21 (KJV)

.... The longsuffering God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us.....

I Pet. 3:20-21 (NIV)

..... when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while

the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also.....

I Pet. 3:221 (LT)

..... which also you antitype now saves, immersion, not of the flesh.....

So, both the KJV and the NIV, for example, show that baptism is not the symbol of anything. They clarify the idea that it's the Noachian Flood waters that symbolize baptism..... in that the flood waters saved the faithful family of Noah, as baptism saves us today.

But let's be even more specific about all this. The whole concept of 'symbolize' is not precisely correct. The LT's use of 'antitype' instead of 'symbolize' introduces a nuance in the meaning of the word that sheds additional light on the subject. Thayer (Reference-12, #499) discusses the subtleties in these words. His *contextual* definition of 'antitype' as it appears in the passage is;

"a thing resembling another, its counterpart;... as baptism corresponds to the deluge:"

So, it's not that baptism symbolizes salvation. It's more like water in its action, resembles baptism in its action; there are these two instances where people were saved by them.

I can only suggest to you that more careful study of these scriptures, in particular, is needed. But in reviewing all the scriptures I previously quoted on baptism, one is lead to the conclusion that it as an integral part of obtaining salvation.

VISITOR:

What about Abraham and Joshua and the Old Testament prophets and others of the ancient times? What about the thief on the cross near Jesus, who was promised salvation? They didn't get baptized in water. You surely don't believe that those faithful people are lost for eternity, do you?

ME:

No,..... not at all. The people who lived prior to Jesus' death on the cross, were living under the Old Covenant (agreement) with God. In the Old Testament the ancient peoples were justified based on their adherence to the Old Law. Beyond the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, a new covenant with God has been in place. Now, we must adhere to God's New Covenant for forgiveness of sins through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross;

Heb. 9:15-18 (NIV)

... Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance- now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when someone has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood.

Heb. 9:22 (NIV)

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleaned with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Heb. 10:8-10 (NIV)

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings, you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

It's also useful to keep in mind that after His death on the cross, Jesus went to the 'good' part of hades (see Chapter-6; On Death);

Acts 2:27 (Interlinear)

*... because not thou wilt abandon the soul of me in hades
nor wilt thou give the holy one of thee to see corruption.*

It would have been easy for Jesus to speak, there, to the saved ones of ancient times. In their acceptance of Him, the following New Testament statement by Jesus would be valid for all people, for all times;

John 14:6 (NIV)

*Jesus answered, "I am the way- and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me ..."*

Even up to His last living moment on the cross, the church had not been established. The nearby thief then, would have been under the Old Law. Baptism would not have been necessary for him. Before Jesus' death, there was no church. It is baptism that places us into the church, according to the New Covenant.

THE CHURCH

Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ, constitute His church. God is going to save only His church. Let's see how the scriptures speak about salvation under this New Covenant.

After Christ's resurrection, Acts Chapter-2 chronicles the beginning of the church. The word, 'church' refers to 'those called out.' As members of this church, Christians are those who are called out from the world and the sinful ways of the world. Christians are called into a body (Christ's body- the church);

Eph. 1:22 (NIV; my underlining)

*And God placed all things under his feet and
appointed him to be head over everything for
the church, which is his body, the fullness*

of him who fills everything in every way.

Eph. 4:4 (NIV; my underlining)

There is one body and one spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called.....

Eph. 4:16 (NIV)

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Eph. 5:22 (NIV; my underlining)

..... Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the savior.

I Cor. 12:13 (NIV; my underlining)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.....

Eph. 4:5 (NIV; my underlining)

..... one Lord, one faith, one baptism.....

So, while the law of our land allows us to freely exercise separate, individual faiths, God allows only *one* faith, and God is going to save only *one* body- his one and only church.

In I Cor. 12:13, baptism is identified as the way we enter into this one saved body. That's surely consistent with the statement of Acts 2:38, associating baptism directly with salvation.

In one conversation, an individual told me that the baptism in I Cor. 12:13 is baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Chapter-7; Miraculous Gifts). The Spirit is

indeed mentioned in this verse. It's true that throughout the New Testament several baptisms are mentioned (e.g., the baptism of John, baptism of the Holy Spirit, water baptism). Chronologically however, Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is one of the last-written books of the Bible. Even a cursory reading of that letter reveals that it deals much with the meaning of the church. Just review the previously quoted verses. So, well after the establishment of the church Paul confirms that there is only *ONE* baptism in effect at that time (Eph. 4:5). The apostles went about converting people according to the Great Commission. They added people to the church using water baptism. This baptism in water then, is the one baptism specified in Paul's letter to the Ephesians;

Acts 2:41 (NIV)

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 22:16 (NIV)

And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

The Spirit mentioned in I Cor. 12:13 is the guiding force who leads one to accept God's word. We know this, because the baptism mentioned in this verse, has the purpose of placing one into the body. This body is the church, consisting of the saved ones. On the other hand, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was *not* for the purpose of salvation (see Chapter-7; Miraculous Gifts).

VISITOR:

Look at this verse, in which Jesus is speaking. Especially compare it to Acts 2:38 which you quoted earlier;

Matt. 26:28 (NIV)

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Our forgiveness of sins is connected directly to the blood Jesus shed on the cross on our behalf. Therefore, the forgiveness of sins being tied to baptism in Acts 2:38, is a secondary matter..... of lesser importance than Jesus' shed blood.

ME:

In Matt 26:28, the forgiveness of sins is indeed the reason for the great sacrifice Jesus made for us. For just a brief moment, let's assume that Jesus never shed His blood in suffering on the cross. In that case then, no matter how much belief, faith, repentance, confession, and baptism we are engaged in, they would *ALL* be meaningless... useless. These things are only the means of reaching out for the gift of salvation that Jesus' sacrifice makes possible. That's the contextual meaning of Matt. 26:28.

VISITOR:

But Acts 2:38 does NOT teach that baptism is necessary for salvation;

Acts 2:38 (KJV)

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.

Instead of 'for' remission of sins, it makes more sense to say, 'on account of' remission of sins. That is, because your sins have been forgiven (you've been saved), you should subsequently get baptized as a sign of your sins being washed away. Since your salvation is tied to remission of sins, and baptism comes later, then baptism cannot be a necessary part of obtaining salvation.

ME:

I think two points invalidate your argument about the relation of baptism to salvation.

The first point doesn't require us to look at any other scripture. Notice that in Acts 2:38, two criteria are connected with forgiveness of sins; repentance and baptism. Let's for a moment, assume your premise is true. If so, then not only would people get baptized because their sins were forgiven, but they'd also repent because their sins were forgiven. This surely puts the cart before the horse. I don't know of any denomination or group that would enthusiastically teach that we can be saved before we repent from our sins. The argument you support then, must be erroneous, because repentance (as well as baptism) is tied to remission of sins in Acts 2:38.

The second point lies in the contextual meaning of 'for' in the phrase, 'for remission of sins.' Here's how the (LT) transliterates the Greek wording into the corresponding English, in Acts 2:38;

Acts 2:38 (LT; my underlining)

Peter and said to them, Change {your} hearts and be immersed each of you upon the name of Jesus Christ to forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This transliterated wording does not use 'for'; it uses 'to' forgiveness of sins. Thayer (Reference-12; #4314) defines 'to' as it is specifically used in this verse;

"..... of the goal or limit towards which a movement is directed."

By this definition then, repentance and baptism are for attaining the goal of remission of sins (i.e., salvation); it's not because the sins had previously been forgiven. Thayer's definition from the Greek is compatible with the idea that one 'reaches out' for salvation by developing belief, faith repentance, confession, and then being baptized.

Both of these points strongly invalidate your suggestion and support the requirement of baptism for obtaining salvation.

THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

What is baptism? Who undergoes baptism, and when? Among the religious denominations, the answers to these questions span an extremely wide spectrum. We could go into each and every difference these groups have with the scriptures. A clearer approach though, is to just see what the What is baptism? Who undergoes baptism, and when? Among the religious denominations the biblical answers are to these questions on baptism.

According to Thayer (Reference-12; #907) the word 'baptism' means to 'immerse' or 'to dip under.' Immersion is simple enough to understand. It's just covering something over completely (here, the body.... with water). For some people though, to 'dip' engenders an image of a dipper. Hence 'dip' to them, means use of a dipper to pour water over something. Actually 'dip' means to plunge or to immerse.... as one dips something into a pool of water. Its meaning is therefore consistent with immersion.

In the scriptures baptism involves immersing a believer into water as a burial. Baptism is completed when the person is raised up out of the water, as in a resurrection (see Rom. 6:1-12). While some groups sprinkle water and some pour water (instead of immersing), the scriptures provide strong evidence that immersion was actually practiced during the building of the early New Testament church. The fact that various denominations have modified the intended meaning of 'immersion' to suit their doctrinal purposes does not validate those purposes. Thayer, in defining 'baptism' also points out;

"..... by Christ's command received by Christians and adjusted to the contents and nature of their religion."

So Thayer also recognized that the various denominations have modified 'immersion' to suit doctrinal needs.

By the following verse, the actions of those in the New Testament are consistent with 'immersion' being the intent and meaning of 'baptism';

Acts 8:38-39 (NIV; my underlining)

..... Then Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water.....

A friend once described to me a scene in one of those religious documentary movies. The scene depicted the events surrounding Philip baptizing the eunuch. In the scene, both men went down into the water. And with the water waist-high, the actor portraying Philip proceeded to pour water over the eunuch's head. The absurdity of the scene of course, is that they didn't need to go *into* the water in order to pour water over his head. The controversy involving immersion (in contrast to pouring or sprinkling) is related to the fact that the early translations did not translate 'baptism' into 'immersion'; instead the Greek word was just lifted up and placed down into the English texts.

The *time* when baptism is performed is also a matter of controversy among the denominations. Some of the most prominent religious groups wait an interval of time sufficient for them to gather a number of new believers. Their new converts are all baptized at once. It's usually done in an elaborate ceremony. Such a procedure does seem economical, and hence reasonable. However, it isn't consistent with the intent of the scriptures. If indeed, baptism is needed for forgiveness of sins, then why would anyone want to wait for it? Look again at the situation where the eunuch believed the gospel Philip taught. The baptism occurred as soon as possible. The scriptural indication is that one should not wait to complete the 'reaching out' for the gift of salvation;

Acts 8:36-38 (NIV; my underlining)

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot.....

Another way of considering this matter, is to keep in mind that baptism is just as valid and important as belief, faith, repentance, and confession, in

reaching out to God for the free gift of salvation He is offering. Would any religious group encourage a believer to wait until a future date before starting to repent? Believe? By their logic, it would make just as much sense.

Here's another controversial point about baptism. The scriptures don't teach that children need baptism. Before people are baptized they are taught the gospel and they become convinced that it is true. These believers become repentant after receiving the word and after that they are baptized. What part of all that can an infant perform.....? The easy answer is just this..... none! Infants and young children are not in a position to understand the message and become repentant. So, there is no basis for baptizing them. Notice what Jesus said about these innocent children obtaining His kingdom;

Matt. 18:3 (NIV)

And he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven."

Some large religious groups baptize infants because of a doctrine they call, 'original sin.' By this doctrine, the sinful nature of mankind is present in the infant. They feel baptism is needed to remove it. Besides the idea that infants are unable to believe or repent, an equally important point is that the doctrine of original sin is false (see Chapter-5; Original Sin) . If indeed, original sin does not exist, then there is no need to baptize infants to rid them of it.

Another justification often used by those who baptize infants is provided by examples in the book of Acts. There, for example, a conversion to Christianity is discussed in which a Centurion (Cornelius) and his house, and a jailer and his house and Lydia had her household are baptized after having received the gospel. Many automatically identify 'house' and 'household' with the presence of young children. The difficulty with this, is that the scriptures make no such conclusion. The scriptures do not specifically say who is a member of any of those households. While Thayer (Reference-12; #3624) studies the word meaning, he does not conclude that infants or young children are present in any of these situations. It doesn't seem like a safe thing to do, to infer concepts 'between the lines' of scripture. We'll always be on more solid ground if we speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the scriptures do so.