

What Is Baptismal Regeneration?

I was raised in the state of Tennessee and encountered a very common church and introduced to a doctrine taught by them. Many of my friends attended this church, we worked and played along beside each other with many from this persuasion. I remember being told that I was going to hell because I did not attend their assembly (The Church) and that Baptists will play their piano right into hell. I would avoid these conversations with them as a young man because to be honest, I was not prepared well enough to converse with them in their debate. In the Baptist tradition we tend to call our pastors by the name Brother. We would often say Brother John or Brother Smith as a way of respect. I remember saying Bro _____ to a local Church of Christ minister when I was a young man and the minister stopped me and said, "You are not my brother, you are my denominational friend. Only those of "THE Church" can call me brother. "While I was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Clifton, I had two Church of Christ ministers ask to meet with me. They wanted to present me with a book written by a former Independent Fundamental Baptist pastor who was now a minister in "The Church." They proceeded to offer to purchase for our church a copy of the book for every member of the church. I was already familiar with the book and had already reviewed the book. I kindly spoke to those men and declining their offer and said, "It was sad that they had a man who was obviously ill informed in the Word and had been debated into becoming one of their followers." I told them that the one whom they chose to parade in public was not a good representative of our beliefs. The question moved to baptism when I told them "If baptism was necessary for salvation, then it took man to save man and there we differ." I also stated to them, "You know how convinced you are that Baptists are wrong and going to hell, I am 100 times more convinces that they were brain washed and misled." I personally do think there are genuine believers in this group and will go to heaven but not because they belong to "The Church" as they define it but because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do know that there are some in this organization who are not as aggressive and do not hold to the mentioned beliefs. I have had some even apologize for the others' behaviors.

I have therefore put something together that is in no way exhaustive to help one deal with this terrible doctrine and possibly help in answering their questions over baptism. While there are many other doctrinal differences this is only to deal with baptism.

Baptismal regeneration is the belief that **baptism is essential for salvation** — that a person’s sins are not forgiven and they are not “born again” until they are baptized in water (usually by immersion).

In the **Church of Christ**, this is taught as part of what they call “**obedient faith.**” They would say:

“Baptism is the moment at which God washes away sin, and one enters into Christ and receives the Holy Spirit.”

So, they do not usually claim that baptism *earns* salvation, but that it is the **necessary act of faith** by which salvation is *received*.

What Is Baptismal Regeneration (Church of Christ Doctrine)?

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◇ Their Commonly Used Proof Texts

Below are the main Scriptures cited by the Church of Christ to support baptismal regeneration:

Passage	Their Interpretation	Refutation Summary
Mark 16:16 – “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”	They say belief + baptism = salvation.	The verse continues: “but he who does not believe will be condemned.” The condemnation is based on unbelief , not lack of baptism. The omission shows that belief, not baptism, is the essential condition.
Acts 2:38 – “Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins.”	They claim forgiveness is granted at baptism.	The Greek preposition <i>eis</i> (“for”) can also mean “because of” (as in Matthew 12:41). The emphasis is on repentance as the inward act; baptism is the outward expression. Compare with Acts 10:43–48 — Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before baptism.
Acts 22:16 – “Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins...”	They argue baptism itself washes away sin.	The phrase “calling on His name” defines how the sins are washed away (Romans 10:13). Grammatically, <i>calling on His name</i> modifies <i>wash away your sins</i> — not <i>be baptized</i> .
1 Peter 3:21 – “Baptism now saves you...”	They claim baptism is the saving act.	Peter immediately clarifies: “not the removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The saving agent is Christ’s resurrection, not the water itself.
John 3:5 – “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit...”	They say “water” means baptism.	In context, Jesus refers to spiritual cleansing promised in Ezekiel 36:25–27 — “I will sprinkle clean water on you... and give you a new spirit.” The “water” is symbolic of cleansing, not literal baptism.
Titus 3:5 – “He saved us through the washing of regeneration...”	They claim “washing” = baptism.	The Greek <i>loutron</i> (“washing”) is figurative of spiritual cleansing — the “regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” It’s the Spirit’s work, not water.
Romans 6:3–4 – “Baptized into Christ Jesus... into His death.”	They say baptism unites us with Christ.	The passage uses baptism figuratively to describe spiritual union with Christ’s death and resurrection — not the physical act. Paul emphasizes <i>faith</i> as the means of union (Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:26).

◇ Key Refutations from Scripture

1. Salvation is by Grace Through Faith Alone

- **Ephesians 2:8–9** – “For by grace you have been saved through faith... not a result of works.”
- **Romans 3:28** – “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”
- **John 3:16** – Faith alone is mentioned — no mention of baptism.

☞ *If baptism were essential, these core salvation texts would be incomplete — yet they stand clearly without it.*

2. People Are Saved Before Baptism in the New Testament

- **Cornelius (Acts 10:43–48):** He received the Holy Spirit **before** baptism — proof he was already saved (Romans 8:9).
- **The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:42–43):** Saved without baptism.
- **Paul himself (Acts 9:17–18):** Received the Holy Spirit *before* his baptism.

3. Baptism Is a Symbol and Public Declaration of Faith

- **Romans 6:4** – Baptism symbolizes being buried and raised with Christ.
- **Colossians 2:12** – “You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised through faith...”
→ Notice: **“through faith”** — faith is the means of receiving the reality baptism represents.

4. Water Does Not Cleanse the Soul — Christ’s Blood Does

- **1 John 1:7** – “The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.”
- **Revelation 1:5** – He “washed us from our sins in His own blood.”
- **Hebrews 10:22** – Our hearts are sprinkled clean, not with water, but by Christ’s sacrifice.

5. Baptism Follows Salvation, It Doesn’t Cause It

In Acts:

- People **believed, received the Word, and then were baptized** (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:31–33).
- Baptism consistently follows conversion, as a testimony — not as a means.

◇ Summary Refutation

Church of Christ Claim	Biblical Response
Baptism is necessary for salvation.	Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9). Baptism follows as a sign of obedience.
Baptism washes away sin.	Only Christ’s blood cleanses from sin (1 John 1:7).

One cannot be “in Christ” until baptized.	Faith alone unites us with Christ (Gal. 3:26).
Acts 2:38 requires baptism for forgiveness.	Greek grammar and Acts 10 show forgiveness precedes baptism.

Balanced Biblical View

Baptism is **commanded**, **important**, and **symbolic** of death to sin and new life in Christ — but it is **not the means of justification**.

It’s the **outward expression of an inward reality** that comes through **repentance and faith** in Christ

1. Salvation is by Grace Through Faith Alone

* Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith...not a result of works.” Faith and Grace are bestowed upon the repentant sinner Sovereignly by God.

* Romans 3:28 “We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

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