

Study guide for considering whether water baptism is a requirement for members of the body of Christ

Each of the four gospels records different events and words of Christ during the period between His resurrection and His ascension.

One can infer that they recorded events and words of Christ that corresponded to their audience and their purpose.

Matthew and Mark record Jesus telling the disciples to baptize.

Luke and John do not.

Matthew wrote his gospel for **the Jews**, to reveal Jesus as their Messiah and Redeemer.

Mark was closely connected with **Peter**. His gospel records events through Peter's eyes. You can view the gospel of Mark as an expansion of Peter's message to the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea in Acts 10. And note carefully what Peter says in Acts 11:16 when he recounts this event to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

There is nothing about baptism in our Lord's commission to the disciples at the end of the Gospel of Luke. Luke does record what our Lord said (Luke 24:44-49) just before He ascended into heaven. In Luke, our Lord told them that **repentance for forgiveness of sins** would be proclaimed in Christ's name – the name of the Jewish Messiah - to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The message of repentance for forgiveness of sins was the message that John the Baptist delivered to **the nation of Israel**. Plus, Jesus began His statement here in Luke 23 by talking about the fact that these things were written about Christ in the **Old Testament**.

There is no reference to baptism in the Gospel of John after chapter 4 (except for a reference back to the place where John was baptizing). Our Lord's post-Resurrection commission to the disciples in the gospel of John mentions nothing about baptism.

Acts chapter 1 also records events after the resurrection of Christ that lead up to His ascension. He does not command the disciples to perform water baptism. Quite the contrary. He contrasts what John had done with water baptism to what was about to happen to the disciples – Spirit baptism.

Acts 1:4-8

4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

In the gospels, and especially in the book of Acts, there is a transition from water baptism to Spirit baptism.

The book of Acts describes the transition from the apostleship to Peter, which was centered in Jerusalem and was primarily to the Jews, to the apostleship of Paul which ended up in Rome and was to the Gentiles.

So we have only the two statements in Matthew and Mark to support a teaching that would make water baptism a required ordinance for the church.

So let's turn our attention to these two accounts.

First, the one in Matthew:

Matt 28:16-20

16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, " All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 " Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Now this language, "all the nations", comes right out of the Old Testament. It referred to the Gentile nations.

Jesus told the eleven to make disciples of all the nations.

There's just one problem: we have no record in the Bible of the eleven ever doing that.

To the contrary, we find them in Jerusalem, and to a limited extent in Samaria.

But not to the ends of the earth. There is no record of that in the Bible.

Were they disobedient?

Or did things start to change after the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came to indwell believers. And after the Lord made a special appearance to appoint another apostle for a very special task.

When Jesus gave the commission to the eleven, who was NOT there?

Paul.

Paul was not under the authority of the eleven.

He was never taught or instructed by the eleven.

Their mandate was not his.

Paul was the one apostle who did bring the gospel to the ends of the known world at that time.

He did not receive his marching orders from the Eleven. That is clear from passages in Galatians and Acts.

Gal 1:1-2

1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

Gal 1:11-2:10

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me.

2:1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. 3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. 6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) — well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor — the very thing I also was eager to do.

Paul received his commission as a revelation directly from the Risen and Glorified Lord Jesus. Not from Peter. Not from James. Not from John.

So their commission – the one in Matthew and Mark - was not passed along to Paul.

And Jesus never commissioned Paul to baptize with water.

What's more, Paul never instructed any of his disciples to baptize with water.

And he emphasized that he hardly performed any water baptisms himself, and the ones he did were in Corinth. This was during Paul's first missionary journey to a church that was consisted of both Jews and Gentiles.

1 Cor 1:14-17

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

Keep in mind that this is the one apostle to the Gentiles saying this. This is the one apostle who actually went to the Gentile nations preaching the gospel.

By the way, Crispus was the leader of the synagogue in Corinth. He was a Jew. And it is quite possible that Gaius and the household of Stephanas were Jews also.

SO let's turn to the only other record of Jesus telling disciples to baptize.

Mark 16:14-20

*Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And He said to them, " **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 " He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. 17 "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."***

19 So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

Again, according to the Biblical record, the Eleven never preached the gospel to all creation. It was Paul who went everywhere preaching.

So here Mark records Jesus saying that he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved.

But let's continue.

He also says concerning these same people, the ones who have believed and have been baptized, that **signs** will accompany them:

1. In Christ's name they will cast out demons
2. They will speak with new tongues
3. They will pick up serpents
4. If they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them
5. They will lay hands on the sick, and the sick will recover.

In other words, these ones who believe and are baptized will receive **miraculous powers**.

When you examine the New Testament record, there was a short period of time after the ascension of Christ where extraordinary miracles and signs were performed. Certainly within one generation this extraordinary ability was no longer present in the church. It was given for the purpose of validating the messengers of the gospel.

The record of the book of Acts describes Peter, Paul, and Phillip performing miracles.

The letter of 1 Corinthians mentions believers having the ability to heal and perform miracles, as does the letter to the Galatians.

1 Cor 12:4-11

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Gal 3:5

5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

And please note that it is not said that water baptism gave them the ability to perform miracles. The Spirit did that.

Yet, other letters speak of this miraculous activity as being a thing of the past.

2 Cor 12:12

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

Heb 2:2-4

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Jesus never told Paul to baptize with water. That was not part of the commission that Jesus gave Paul.

Jesus gave the commission to baptize to the Eleven, including Peter as the leader.

Paul never told anyone to baptize with water. Paul never told Timothy that, or Barnabas, or Titus, or Luke.

Water baptism was used as a sign or message to the Jews.

John baptized with water, but Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

In some cases people who had already been baptized with John's baptism are baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus. These were Jews.

And that brings up something else. There is baptism in the name of Christ. But that is not at all the same thing as being baptized – placed into and identified with -CHRIST!!

Rom 6:3

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4

1 Cor 12:12-13

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Gal 3:26-27

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28

This is the one baptism for the members of the body of Christ, the church. It is the baptism into Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is performed at the moment a person believes. It is not performed by a man. It is not performed with water.

To be clear, this is not a feature of the baptism that Matthew and Mark present at the end of their gospels.

Nor was it a feature of the baptism of John. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. See Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3, Acts 13:23-24, Acts 19:1-6.

John baptized in water so that Christ would be manifested to Israel. See John 1:31.

All four gospel writers record these words contrasting water baptism and Spirit baptism:

Matt 3:11-12

*11 "As for me, **I baptize you with water for repentance**, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.***

Mark 1:6-8

*John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. 7 And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. 8 "**I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**"*

Luke 3:15-17

*15 Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16 John answered and said to them all, "As for me, **I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** 17 "*

John 1:33-34

*"I did not recognize Him, but **He who sent me to baptize in water** said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, **this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.**' 34 "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."*

And in fact Luke in the book of Acts records Jesus saying the same thing right before He ascended into heaven:

Acts 1:1-11

The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

*4 Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; 5 for **John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**"*

6 So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. 11 They also said, " Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Who was sent to baptize?

John the Baptist, and the Eleven led by Peter, John, and James.

What do they all have in common? Who were they all sent to?

The Jews.

Who was sent to the Gentiles?

Paul.

Paul said that the Lord did NOT send him to baptize but to preach the gospel.

And when Paul preached to gospel and a person believed, the Holy Spirit baptized that person into Christ permanently.