

**Christian Baptism (12):
Baptism Washes Sins Away (Acts 22:16)
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Saul of Tarsus, who later would be known as Paul the apostle, was exhorted in Acts 22:16, "... Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

I. Observe what happened to Saul prior to his baptism.

1. Prior to his baptism, Saul was converted ([Acts 9:1-6](#)). This occurred while he was on his way to Damascus to arrest some Christians (vv.1f). But it happened that he was arrested en route by Jesus Christ (vv.3-5). His conversion is evidenced in these words: "So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?'" (v.6). His conversion bore these marks:

i. Saul acknowledged Jesus Christ as "Lord". Prior to this moment Saul had absolutely no respect for Christ, and considered both Him and His disciples accursed. He therefore here did not address Jesus as "Lord" as merely a term of respect. Rather, he by this token submitted to the divine Lordship of Christ in obedience to the command of God "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ..., and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

ii. Saul was indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit. This point necessarily follows the preceding, according to his own testimony ([1 Corinthians 12:3](#)): "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."

iii. Saul repented. Repentance is a change of mind. Saul certainly had changed his! In one breath he in rebellion is trying to do harm against Christ; in the next he in submission to Christ is imploring, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

iv. Saul believed. If he is willing to do whatever Christ requires, he must trust Him. If he trusts in the Lord, he is a believer in Him, no longer a rebel against Him. Yes, *prior* to being baptized, Saul was converted.

2. Prior to his baptism, Saul was called to be a preacher of the gospel ([Acts 26:16-18](#)): Jesus said to Saul, "But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Note well that when Jesus said "I now send you" as "a minister and a witness", Saul was yet *unbaptized*.

And prior to Saul's baptism, his calling into the gospel ministry was confirmed by the Lord to Ananias ([Acts 9:15](#)): "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go, for [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.'" Ananias dutifully conveyed this message to Saul, informing him that the Lord had placed him into the ministry -

But Saul was yet *not* baptized!

3. Prior to his baptism, Saul was qualified to be an apostle of Jesus Christ (same text as in the preceding point). He refers to this event on the road to Damascus when he later asks, "Am I not an apostle? ... Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" ([1 Corinthians 9:1](#)). He here both saw and heard the Lord ([Act 9:4,6,19](#)). He here was "appointed [both] a preacher and an apostle" ([1 Timothy 2:7](#)). He here was qualified to be an apostle by having seen the resurrected Christ and in being commissioned by Him to be His minister and witness in the office of apostle.

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4. Prior to his baptism, Saul performed justifying works ([Acts 26:19](#)). Saving faith must be accompanied by godly works, because "faith without works is dead" ([James 2:20](#)). Saul testified that from the very moment he saw Christ on the road to Damascus, his faith in the Lord was very much alive: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Having believed on Christ, he immediately went to work for Him to perform what Christ had called "all things which are appointed for you to do" ([Acts 22:10](#)). Saul was thereby "justified by works, and not by faith only" ([James 2:24](#)).

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5. Prior to his baptism, Saul had his prayer heard and answered by God ([Act 9:11](#)): "So the Lord said to ["a certain

disciple at Damascus named Ananias" ([v. 10](#))], 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.'" "Now we know that God does not hear sinners [indeed, "even his prayer shall be an abomination" ([Proverbs 28:9](#))]; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" ([John 9:31](#)). God heard Saul. God therefore now considered Saul a saint, not a sinner, and a worshiper of Him, not a rebel against Him. And God answered Saul's prayer. But Saul was yet *not* baptized!

6. Prior to his baptism, Saul was ordained by Christ to suffer for the sake of Christ's name ([Acts 9:15f](#)): "But the Lord said to Ananias, '... Go, for [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine ... For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.'" Christ ordained Saul to suffer for Him ?? But Saul was yet *not* baptized!

7. Prior to his baptism, Saul was acknowledged as a Christian "brother" ([Acts 9:17](#)): The Christian disciple Ananias said to him, "*Brother* Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Ananias did not, as some aver, acknowledge Saul as a brother in some mere *earthly* sense. Rather, he recognized Saul as a "brother" *in the Lord*, one who is to be "filled with the Holy Spirit". But Saul was yet *not* baptized!

II. Observe now why Saul was baptized: "Arise and be baptized, and *wash away your sins*, calling on the name of the Lord" ([Acts 22:16](#)).

1. Saul was not baptized in order to be saved. He already was saved! As we have already observed from God's Word, *before* his baptism Saul was converted to Christ, called to be a preacher of the gospel, qualified by Christ to be His apostle, performed justifying works, had his prayer heard and answered by God, was ordained by Christ to suffer for His name's sake, and acknowledged as a Christian brother by a saint sent from God to him. He who would aver that all these things could be said of an unsaved man has perverted Paul's doctrine to his own destruction ([2 Peter 3:15f](#)) and embraced a man-made gospel.

2. Saul was not baptized in order to actually wash away his sins. While it is true that counterfeit preachers from Satan would have us believe we *actually* wash away our sins in the waters of baptism, God declares otherwise. It was of Christ that God prophesied, "In that day a fountain shall be opened

... for sin and for uncleanness" ([Zechariah 13:1](#)). God's saints confess that nothing but "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, [will] purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" ([Hebrews 9:14](#)). God's saints have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" ([Revelation 7:14](#)). God's saints therefore exalt "Him [Christ Jesus] who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood" ([Revelation 1:5](#)). They therefore sing:

*There is a fountain filled with blood, / Drawn from
Emmanuel's veins,
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, / Lose all their
guilty stains.
The dying thief rejoiced to see / That fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, / Washed all my sins
away.
And they furthermore sing:
What can wash away my sins? / Nothing but the blood of
Jesus!*

3. Saul was baptized as a testimony that his sins had already actually been washed away by Christ. This is true because baptism is an ordinance, like the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant and the Lord's Supper of the New Covenant. Ordinances symbolize a reality. He who participates in an ordinance testifies to the reality it symbolizes. Therefore, we only *symbolically*, not *really*, eat the body of Christ and drink His blood in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper ([Matthew 26:26-28](#)). And when Christ cleansed a man of his physical impurity in [Luke 5:12-14](#), the Lord told the man to "make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony". This "offering for cleansing" did not *really* cleanse the man. Christ had *already* cleansed him. His offering was therefore but a *testimony to others* of that truth.

The same is true with the cleansing of *spiritual* impurity in baptism. The cleansing is *really* done by Christ's blood. Baptism is but a "testimony" to others of this cleansing. Baptism is therefore "not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" ([1 Peter 3:21](#)).