

# Does Baptism Save Us? (1 Peter 3:21)

If you ever discuss the topic of baptism with someone who believes in baptismal regeneration, 1 Peter 3:21 will come up in the discussion for certain. This is central to the defense of this doctrine.

Let's look at the passage in context

*1 Peter 3:18-22*

*18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.*

*NKJV*

We see three things discussed here:

- 1) Noah's Ark and its role in saving people through the flood
- 2) Water baptism
- 3) The gospel and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This passage relates these three items by showing how they relate. First Peter speaks the death of Christ on the cross, setting the focus for the passage. As a result of this passage, we know that the focus of the verses that follow are regarding the death of Christ on the cross for our sins.

This death for our sins is then compared, to the flood, with the flood discussed as a symbolic “type” or comparison to salvation which come through the cross of Christ. Then we are told that there is an anti-type, baptism. I often hear the argument that an “anti-type” is the opposite of a type, or as one person recently said, an anti-type being the opposite of a type is “reality”. Unfortunately that argument is not “reality” because in Greek and similar languages, “anti-” often does not mean “opposite” as we understand it in English, but rather means a replacement or a contrast. This when we are told about one type, and then we are told that there is an anti-type, what we see here is a contrasting type of the death on the cross.

an·ti·type n.

Page 1 of 4

One that is foreshadowed by or identified with an earlier symbol or type, such as a figure in the New Testament who has a counterpart in the Old Testament.

An opposite or contrasting type.

*Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition  
Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.*

This understanding also agrees with what Paul said in Romans 6 where he identifies baptism as a “likeness” or symbolic of the death and resurrection on the cross:

*Rom 6:3-7*

*3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*

*NKJV*

In discussions with proponents of baptismal regeneration, they will often just read out Romans 6:3 and then stop before you get to the verse which describes baptism as a “likeness” of the death and resurrection of Christ. So we find that Romans 6 and 1 Peter 3 are telling us the same thing – baptism is symbolic.

Now with that in mind, let's look at the verse which is most often quoted by proponents of baptismal regeneration:

*1 Peter 3:21*

*21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh,*

*NKJV*

The contrasting types, the ark, which saved Noah and family through the water, and baptism which saves us in the water - as a **type**. A "type" simply means symbolic, and thus is symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ through we we are in fact saved.

Now, let's look at the wider context:

*1 Peter 3:18*

*18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to*

Page 2 of 4

*God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,  
NKJV*

Salvation came by Christ suffering on the cross for our sins and then we are made alive by the Spirit. Scripture says that there is one baptism, and it is not a baptism that replaces the blood with water, or replaces the spirit with water, but it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Note that by stating that it is water baptism that is essential, what we are in effect being told is that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not essential, and that they choose water to replace the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Consider the implications.

*1 Peter 3:21*

*21 There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.*

*NKJV*

Note that it is water that removes the filth of the flesh, but the water is symbolic of the salvation on the cross. Also note that the substances which cleanses, is the answer of a good conscience towards God. We see a similar reference in Hebrews 9

This passage is very clear regarding the symbolic nature of the various rituals. As pointed out earlier, the reference here to ritual washings is the same word used elsewhere in the New Testament where it is translated as "baptism".

*Heb 9:11-15*

*11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, **14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?** 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

*NKJV*

We see confirmation here that it is not the water that cleanses, but the blood of Christ sacrificed on the cross.

Page 3 of 4

Tom Smith  
September 6, 2006  
<http://discern.ca>  
[smithj.geo@yahoo.com](mailto:smithj.geo@yahoo.com)

*Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.*

Page 4 of 4

© Tom Smith, [smithj.geo@yahoo.com](mailto:smithj.geo@yahoo.com), 2006. Permission is given to reproduce this document in its entirety, including this copyright notice, for non-commercial purposes and without charge.

<http://discern.ca>