

1 Peter 3:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Analysis

Peter applies Noah's flood to Christian baptism. "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us" (ho kai hymas antitypon nyn sōzei baptisma). Baptism corresponds to flood as antitype to type. The crucial clarification: "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (ou sarkos apόthesis rhypou alla syneidēsēōs agathēs eperōtēma eis theon). Baptism doesn't save through water washing physical dirt but through appeal/pledge of good conscience to God. It's outward sign of inward reality—faith, repentance, commitment to Christ. The means: "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (di' anastaseōs Iēsou Christou). Christ's resurrection saves; baptism testifies to identification with Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4).

Historical Context

This verse sparked controversy regarding baptismal regeneration. Peter explicitly denies water itself saves ("not putting away filth"). Baptism saves as sign/seal of faith's reality, not magical ritual. As flood waters saved Noah's family (carrying ark to safety), baptism signifies believer's salvation through identification with Christ's death/resurrection. Reformed theology sees baptism as covenant sign (like circumcision in Old Testament) pointing to spiritual reality, not causing it. Early church practiced baptism as initiation rite signifying conversion, repentance, faith.

The 'good conscience pledge' indicates baptism is conscious commitment to Christ, implying believer's baptism or at least conscious covenant renewal.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How is baptism a 'pledge of good conscience toward God' rather than magical ritual that automatically saves?
2. What does baptism signify about your identification with Christ's death and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

ὅ	καὶ	ἡμᾶς	ἀντίτυπον	νῦν	σώζει	βάπτισμα	οὐ
whereunto	also	us	The like figure	now	doth	even baptism	(not
G3739	G2532	G2248	G499	G3568	G4982	G908	G3756
σαρκὸς	ἀπόθεσις	βύπον	ἀλλὰ	συνειδήσεως	ἀγαθῆς		
of the flesh	the putting away	of the filth	but	conscience	of a good		
G4561	G595	G4509	G235	G4893	G18		
ἐπερώτημα	εἰς	θεόν	δι'	ἀναστάσεως	Ἰησοῦ	Χριστοῦ	
the answer	toward	God) by	the resurrection	of Jesus	Christ	
G1906	G1519	G2316	G1223	G386	G2424	G5547	

Additional Cross-References

Mark 16:16 (Salvation): He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Acts 2:38 (Baptism): 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.

Galatians 3:27 (Baptism): For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Acts 22:16 (Resurrection): And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Ephesians 5:26 (Parallel theme): That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

1 Peter 1:3 (Resurrection): Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Corinthians 12:13 (Baptism): For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

Colossians 2:12 (Resurrection): Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Matthew 28:19 (Parallel theme): Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Hebrews 9:24 (References Christ): For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: