

# John 3:5-6 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:5-6 NASB)*

**Misinterpretation:** This passage is used by the UPC as evidence that a person must be baptized (born of water) and be filled with the Holy Spirit (born of the Spirit) in order to enter the kingdom of God. In other words, to be saved, according to the UPC's interpretation of this passage, a person must be baptized of water and receive the Holy Spirit.

**Facts:** It's indisputably clear that a person must receive the Holy Spirit to be saved (cf. Rom. 8:9). Therefore, the UPC's interpretation of the "born of the Spirit" portion of this passage is correct. (The problem with their view of receiving the Holy Spirit is that it is something that happens after faith—a view that Paul clearly disagrees with in Eph 1:13 when he writes that we are "sealed" with the Holy Spirit upon belief).

The greater question, then, is about baptism. What does Jesus mean when He says that a person must be born of water to enter the kingdom of Heaven? Is He referring to water baptism or something else?

In order to answer that question I'd like to quote from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary. Their explanation of this passage is the best that I've read anywhere. I could just paraphrase it but in my mind that would be plagiarism. They sum it up better than I ever could.

Before I give the citation, though, I'd like to stress that

baptism is indeed commanded by Christ (cf. Mat. 28:19). Because of that, if a person claims to have believed and yet refuses to obey Christ then I doubt the sincerity of their belief. Nevertheless, baptism is a *response* to grace, it is not the *cause* of grace. We get baptized *because* we are saved, not *order to get* saved.

Without further ado, here is the quote from Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary ((I apologize for the long paragraph; that is how it was written))

*Of water has been interpreted as: (1) water baptism. But the NT teaches that one is born again at the point of faith, not baptism (Acts 10:43–47); (2) a synonym for the Holy Spirit. The phrase could be translated “born of water, even the spirit”; (3) a symbol of the Word of God (Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 1:23); (4) physical birth; (5) John's baptism; or (6) a symbol, along with wind, in OT imagery for the work of God from above. The first three views are questionable since they must rely on future teaching in the Scripture which would not have been accessible to Jesus' listeners For interpretation 4, the idea is that Nicodemus brought up physical birth (3:4) and Jesus went on to say, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (3:6). If one could enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, he would still be flesh. This position is not likely since Jesus' words would be trivial and do not advance the argument. Options 5 and 6 are the better choices for the meaning of the statement. Option 5 is a viable one since Nicodemus would probably be familiar with John's baptism. Jesus would be saying that one must identify with and accept John's message (baptism) and then one would receive Messiah's baptism in the Spirit as John promised (1:31–33). This view has both historical and theological support. Christ emphasizes by v. 6 that there are two realms, that of the flesh and the Spirit. Humans cannot save themselves but must rely on God's Spirit to regenerate them. Option 6 relies on the translation of pneuma, wind or spirit.*

*Under this view the Greek term should be understood as wind rather than spirit and thus serve alongside of water as symbols for spiritual truths similar to how these terms are used in the OT (for example, Is. 44:3–5 and Ezek. 37:9, 10). Jesus, then, is contrasting the things from below (earthly womb) from the elements of water and wind from above (the divine work of the Spirit of God). A teacher of Israel should understand such OT imagery. Nicodemus may have been challenged by Christ, since he was a teacher of Israel, to understand the questions of Prov. 30:3–5: (1) Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? (2) Who has gathered the wind in His fist? (3) Who has bound the waters in a garment? (4) Who has established all the ends of the earth? (5) What is His name, and what is His Son's name? "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him" (compare John 3:15, 16). (( Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Jn 3:5.))*

I agree with their opinion that views 5 and 6 are the most likely. I used to believe that being born of water referred to baptism, but I changed my mind even before I left the UPC. I decided that it was more likely that it referred to physical birth while being born of the Spirit referred to spiritual birth. I still think that is a plausible view; it does make sense textually. However, I now think that it was referring to OT imagery. I'm not dogmatic about my view because there are other explanations that make sense. This is one of those passages that has several potential interpretations. The one thing that they all agree on, though, is that Jesus is clearly saying that the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation. That's what we need to focus on. The method of receiving the Holy Spirit—belief—is given several verses later, in John 3:16.

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# Introduction (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

There are many Scriptures that are misinterpreted by Oneness Pentecostals. I have decided to create a list of the most common ones on this page. Some of these Scriptures are misinterpreted by most, if not all, Christians, but most of the Scriptures on this page are misinterpreted mostly by Oneness Pentecostals.

My breakdown of these Scriptures will follow this format: I will give the Scripture, then give the common misinterpretation, and then explain the correct meaning of the Scripture. I have listed these in the order that they appear in the Bible. Also, I use the KJV translation when I first quote each Scripture. I do this because the KJV is the translation most used by Oneness Pentecostals, and some of their misinterpretations come directly from a misunderstanding of the King's English.

***Disclaimer:*** *I created this list of Scriptures from my own experiences in the UPC. I am not saying that the "misinterpretations" that I list are the views that are officially endorsed by the UPC or any other Oneness organization. I am only giving the interpretations that I heard time and time again during my years in the UPC.*

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## 2 Samuel 6:14 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is often used to tell people that there is something wrong with their spiritual life (usually pride) if they do not dance during worship.

**Facts:** There is nothing wrong with dancing in worship. As a matter of fact, dancing as a form of worship to the true God has a long, long heritage. It dates at least back to the Israelite exodus from Egypt, when Miriam, the sister of Moses, led some of the women of Israel in dance (Ex. 15:20). However, just because David danced does not mean that people have to dance.

The problem with the UPC presentation of David's dance is that they often say that if a person refuses to dance during worship then something is wrong with their spiritual walk. If this is true, then we all should have to wear linen ephods to truly worship the Lord. After all, that's what David was doing!

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## 2 Chronicles 7:14 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive*

*their sin, and will heal their land.*

**Misinterpretation:** Some in the UPC say that the people "called by God's Name" are Oneness Pentecostals (because they believe in baptism in Jesus' Name).

**Facts:** This Scripture was written at least 400-500 years before Christ ((Dyer, C., Merrill, E., Swindoll, C. R., & Zuck, R. B. (2001). *Nelson's Old Testament Survey : Discover the Background, Theology and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (294). Nashville: Word.)), and the event that it was recording was the dedication of Solomon's Temple, which happened almost 1,000 years before Christ ((Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary*. Rev. ed. of: *Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary*.; Includes index ("Solomon's Temple"). Nashville: T. Nelson.))! The promise in 2 Chr. 7:14 was to the Jews, not to Oneness Pentecostals, or even to Christians in general. Of course, I do believe that the forgiveness of sins is a Biblical concept, and this Scripture is certainly a beautiful illustration of that! However, it is a mistake to say that this Scripture is talking directly to anyone but the Israelites.

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## [Isaiah 47:2 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*Take the millstones, and grind meal: uncover thy locks, make bare the leg, uncover the thigh, pass over the rivers.*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC often uses this Scripture to try to

prove that it is wrong for men to wear shorts or for women to wear skirts above the knee.

**Facts:** If this Scripture is teaching that men cannot wear shorts then it is also teaching that women cannot remove their veils. Let's take a closer look at the Scripture to see what I mean.

To understand this Scripture we must look at what the phrase "uncover thy locks" means. "Uncover thy locks" means "remove the veil." Here is how several mainstream English translations render Isa. 47:2 (I have included Young's Literal Translation, since many UPC pastors use this translation for study):

*Isa 47:2 YLT (Young's Literal Translation)*

*Take millstones, and grind flour, Remove thy veil, draw up the skirt, Uncover the leg, pass over the floods.*

*Isa 47:2 NASB*

*Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil, strip off the skirt, Uncover the leg, cross the rivers.*

*Isa 47:2 ESV*

*Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers.*

*Isa 47:2 GNB*

*Turn the millstone! Grind the flour! Off with your veil! Strip off your fine clothes! Lift up your skirts to cross the streams!*

*Isa 47:2 JPS (Jewish Translation of the Old Testament)*

*Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove thy veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.*

I included these five mainstream English translations because I want to show that the common rendering of the verse is "remove your veil," and that it is not a translation that I came up with on my own. My point is this: If this verse proves

that it is immodest for a person to wear shorts or skirts above the knee then it also proves that it is immodest for women to remove their veils.

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## Malachi 3:8-10 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

**Misinterpretation:** This passage is often used by many different Christians to prove the importance of tithing.

**Facts:** Tithing is one of the most misunderstood subjects in Christianity today, and space does not permit a full discussion of the topic. Suffice it to say that tithing is part of the Mosaic Law, it is not part of the New Testament model of giving. The New Testament model of giving is that every person gives to others as they are able (cf. Heb. 13:16; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6-8), and that they give to the one who teaches the Word (Gal. 6:6). It is safe to say that the New Testament model is that we give willingly, to those who have need, out of all of our excess, not just 10%!

One of the problems with giving today is that many Christians give 10% out of fear that they will be cursed by God if they

do not give 10%; then they do not give any more than 10%, even if they have an abundance and a brother or sister is in need! This is the antithesis of New Testament giving. We should pray and ask how much God wants us to give directly to our local church, and then we should give out of our excess to brothers, sisters, widows, orphans, and whoever else we can. Also, we should give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7), not out of fear of being cursed.

I find it horrible that when a brother or sister is in financial need all that many pastors will do is ask them if they are paying their tithes, and then, if the person is not paying their tithes, tell them that they are under a curse from God! This type of teaching is a travesty— it is a stain on Christianity. When a brother or sister is in need then the local church should be the first to step in and help them. Of course, wisdom and discretion are necessary, since we need to be sure that we are giving to a legitimate need, and that the money will not be misused. However, we should definitely give!

If you would like more information on this topic then I recommend reading this paper: "[Embezzlement: The Corporate Sin of Contemporary Christianity?](#)" You may also want to check out [www.relationaltithe.com](http://www.relationaltithe.com) (the site that hosts the Embezzlement paper). I also strongly recommend reading the Bible study titled "[So What's the Deal On First Fruits?](#)", written by Bro. Buddy of [Christian Challenge](#).

Finally, you may find it interesting that the Israelites in the Old Testament did not tithe 10%, they tithed 20-30%, depending on which historian you listen to ((Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index ("Tithing"). Nashville: T. Nelson.)). I mention this because many times preachers teach that tithing is not found in the New Testament, but it is a Biblical concept found in the Mosaic Law. If that's the case, then we should tithe 20-30%,

just like the Israelites did!

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## [Matthew 5:36 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is used by some UPC pastors to teach that people are not allowed to dye their hair.

**Facts:** This Scripture is obviously not talking about a person dying their hair. I have written more about this Scripture in this article: "[What Does the Bible Say About Dying Your Hair?](#)"

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## [Matthew 28:19 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC points out that this Scripture says to baptize in the Name (singular). They go on to say that the Name is Jesus, and they quote Acts 2:38 as proof (because Peter instructed people to be baptized in the Name of Jesus). Unfortunately, the UPC believes that if a person was baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, then their

baptism was invalid and they are not truly saved.

**Facts:** I will not open up a debate on Oneness vs. the Trinity here, or a debate on whether or not baptism is necessary for salvation. Instead, I will say that I really do not think that Jesus is going to send the majority of His followers to hell for obeying Him. Think about that for a moment. Is Jesus really going to take a person who love Him and faithfully served Him, but was baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and send them to hell—especially when He was the one who told them to be baptized that way? Is that really the kind of God that we serve?

Furthermore, if the UPC view is true then the majority of so-called Christians for the last 2,000 years have gone to hell. I find it hard to believe that Jesus came to Earth, suffered, died, was buried, and rose again, just so that He could trick almost all of His followers into going to hell.

Finally, the UPC often claims that Christians baptized in the Name of Jesus until the Roman Catholic church came on the scene. They believe that the Roman Catholic church corrupted Christianity with the doctrine of the Trinity (which the UPC equates with polytheism) and a false baptism. However, recent historical discoveries make it clear that the early Church was baptizing people in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost at a very early date. The Didache—written between c50-250 A.D.—instructs people to be baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ((Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., Harrison, R. K., & Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Rev. ed. of: Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.; Includes index ("Didache"). Nashville: T. Nelson.)). This means that it is very possible that the early Church was already baptizing people in the Titles when the Apostle John was still alive!

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# Mark 16:16 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC and some other groups often use this Scripture to say that a person must be baptized to be saved.

**Facts:** The purpose of this discussion is not to talk about whether or not baptism is necessary, but to point out that Mark 16:16 is almost certainly an apocryphal Scripture (meaning that it was probably not part of the original Book of Mark). As a matter of fact, all of verses 9-20 are apocryphal in the 16th chapter of Mark. Most modern English translations put Mark 16:9-20 in brackets to show the reader that those verses were probably not in the original text.

I will not go into all of the reasons that scholars think these 11 verses are apocryphal. Instead, I will point the reader to two very good overviews of the subject. This first is a collection of comments from various study Bibles and commentaries, found at the [Bible Research](#) Web site. This site also offers an article by a scholar who does feel that Mark 16:9-20 was part of the original text, so you can read both sides of the debate. The second is the [Wikipedia article on Mark 16](#). Both of these sites are excellent starting points for you to do your own study into the subject.

Finally, I want to remind you once again that I am not debating baptism here, I am only pointing out that Mark 16:16 should not be used to try to prove the necessity of baptism.

Please do not write me with all the reasons you think baptism is necessary! I believe that it is necessary as well (although I do think there are circumstances where a person can be saved without being baptized [cf. Luke 23:39-43]), so you will be wasting your time by e-mailing me!

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## Mark 16:17-18 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is often used to support the UPC doctrine that says a person must speak in tongues to be saved.

**Facts:** First, this is an apocryphal Scripture (see [my comments on Mark 16:16](#)). Second, if this Scripture means that all believers will speak in tongues then it also means that all believers will cast out devils, take up serpents, and heal the sick by laying hands on them. Finally, even if this Scripture is not apocryphal, there is nothing in it that says that all believers will do these things. It only lists some signs that will follow believers as a whole, not as individuals.

No one doubts that the early Church spoke in tongues, and quite a few Christians do not doubt that tongues and interpretation is still a spiritual gift that God gives out today. The problem is when people start to teach that *all*

believers will speak in tongues, and they try to use Mark 16:17-18 to prove it.

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## John 3:16 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

**Misinterpretation:** I have heard several UPC preachers say that this Scripture does not say that people *will* be saved if they believe on Christ, it only says that they *should* be saved. Many of them then go on to say that a person who truly believes will be baptized in Jesus' Name and speak in tongues, at which point they will actually be saved. I am ashamed to admit that I once taught this view.

**Facts:** The context of the Scripture makes it clear that Jesus is saying that those who believe on Him will be saved. To understand this point, let's look at the verses immediately preceding John 3:16:

*Joh 3:14-15 KJV*

*(14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:*

*(15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

In this passage Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus how a man will be "born again." Nicodemus had asked Jesus, "How can these things be?" Jesus responds by comparing Himself with the

bronze serpent that Moses created. The story of the bronze serpent is not very well known, so you may want to take a moment to read it. It is found in Numbers 21:1-9.

The summary of the story is that God sent fiery serpents into the camp of Israel, and many were bitten and were dying. God commands Moses to create a serpent and to lift it up on a pole. Moses does this by creating a serpent from bronze. When the serpent was lifted up, everyone who looked at the serpent was healed.

Returning to John, Jesus compares Himself to this serpent. He tells Nicodemus that He will be lifted up as well (referring to His death on the Cross) and that whoever believes on Him will have eternal life. So, once the Scripture is read in context, it becomes clear that Jesus is saying that those who believe on Him will be saved.

Interestingly enough, all of this is relating to being born again of the Spirit. The method that Jesus outlines is for a person to believe on Him. This is the antithesis of the UPC view that says a person must pray and pray and pray and humble themselves until they are "filled with the Holy Ghost" and speak in tongues.

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## **Acts 2:37-38 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)**

*Now when [the Jews present at the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost] heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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.*

**Misinterpretation:** This is the “flagship” Scripture of the UPC and of all Oneness Pentecostal churches. There are many ways that this Scripture is mistaught by the UPC, but the only error that I will point out here is that many Oneness Pentecostal preachers and saints misquote the Scripture by reciting, “Men and brethren, what shall we do *to be saved.*”

**Facts:** The careful reader will notice that the words “to be saved” are not found in Acts 2:37. Peter had already told the believers how to be saved in Acts 2:21, when he quoted the prophet Joel and said, “[W]hosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” By the time Peter concluded his sermon in Acts 2:36, the Jews who were present were “pricked in their heart.” That is when they asked Peter and the “rest of the apostles,” “[W]hat shall we do?”

The reason that this is important is because these men had already believed in Christ. That’s why they were pricked in their heart! They wouldn’t have ever asked the question unless they already believed on Christ! If they didn’t believe then they would have laughed and walked off. However, they did believe, and so they were moved to ask what they needed to do. Peter responded by telling them to be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, and that they would receive the Holy Ghost.

The point is that it was not baptism who saved the new believers, it was their belief. (More properly, it was God’s grace working through their belief). Their baptism was a *response* to their salvation, not the *cause* of their salvation. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia sums it up well when they write, “Peter’s ‘Repent ye, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Act\_2:38) is meaningless unless faith were exercised in Christ.” ((ISBE, “Justification”))

I will conclude my discussion of Acts 2:37-38 by quoting the

story of the jailer's conversion, found in Acts 16:27-34, which makes the distinction between belief and baptism even more clearer.

*Act 16:27-34 KJV*

*(27) And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

*(28) But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*

*(29) Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,*

*(30) And brought them out, and said, Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?***

*(31) **And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.***

*(32) And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

*(33) And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

*(34) And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

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## **Acts 4:12 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)**

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is often quoted by Oneness Pentecostals as a proof for the importance of baptism in Jesus' Name. Their reasoning is that no one will be saved except by the Name of Jesus, so that means that people must be baptized in the Name of Jesus to be saved.

**Facts:** No true Christian doubts that a person will only be saved by the Name of Jesus. However, Peter was not talking about baptism in Acts 4:12. He was answering the question that the high priest had just asked him, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts 4:7 KJV). Peter answers that the power, or Name, that he has done these things through is the Name of Jesus, "[F]or there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Some members of the UPC would probably continue to debate this point with me. They might claim that the Bible says "we **must** be saved" by the Name of Jesus. My response would be that it is God's grace working through our faith that saves, not baptism, and I agree that if a person does not believe in the Name of Jesus then they will not be saved. However, I do not believe that a person must be baptized in the Name of Jesus to be saved. To believe that is the equivalent of teaching that Jesus will send people to hell for obeying Him (cf. Mat. 28:19).

Is Jesus really going to send people to hell for taking him literally when he commanded his disciples to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? People who baptize this way are not denying Jesus, they are actually doing their best to obey Him! You see, it is not what is said during baptism that saves you, it is God's grace working through faith.

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# Colossians 3:17 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

**Misinterpretation:** This Scripture is used to teach that baptism in the Name of Jesus is necessary. The logic is that we are supposed to do *everything* in the Name of Jesus, and *everything* includes baptism. UPC preachers often go on to say that Trinitarian preachers will pray in the Name of Jesus, marry in the Name of Jesus, and do many other things in the Name of Jesus, but that they will not baptize in the Name of Jesus.

**Facts:** First, this Scripture has nothing to do with baptism. Paul is writing about living a godly life, and he is reminding people that they need to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus." One could think of this as an ancient "WWJD" saying. Paul was reminding the Colossian church to always live their lives in a way that is pleasing to God (cf. Col. 3:8-17). Second, the UPC forgets that Trinitarian preachers are obeying Jesus when they baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost [see [my notes on Mat. 28:19](#)].

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# 1 Timothy 3:16 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen*

*of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

**Misinterpretation:** The UPC uses this Scripture as one of their major proofs for the doctrine of the Oneness of God. They claim that the mystery of the Godhead is revealed in 1 Tim. 3:16, because God was manifest in the flesh (as Jesus), justified in the Spirit (as the Holy Ghost), and received up into glory (where He steps back into His role as the Father).

**Facts:** This Scripture says that the mystery of *godliness* is great, not the mystery of the *Godhead*.

To understand this Scripture we must back up and look at the context. Paul is explaining to Timothy how bishops and deacons should live. A good starting place to get an idea of the context is 1 Tim. 3:14:

*1Ti 3:14-16 KJV*

*(14) These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:*

*(15) But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

*(16) And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

It is clear that Paul is explaining "how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God." He then concludes with 1 Tim. 3:16.

So what was Paul's point? Why did he jump from "how to live" to Jesus? The clearest answer that I have found is in The Complete WordStudy Dictionary's article on the Greek word for "godliness." This is what it says:

*In 1 Tim. 3:16, we are told that [godliness] is a mystery. This refers to a holy life resulting from God's incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ when that incarnation and all that it entails is truly believed. This is [godliness], a holiness initiated in the life of the believer by Christ Himself through the Holy Spirit ((The Complete WordStudy Dictionary, "G2150")).*

I think that this explanation makes sense, but some readers may disagree with me. Either way, the point remains the same: Paul was not talking about the Godhead in 1 Tim. 3:16.

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## [Romans 12:1-2 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

**Misinterpretation:** Used to promote holiness standards, by saying that we are told to present our bodies "a living sacrifice," etc...

**Facts:** "Bodies" is not "clothing." This Scripture has nothing to do with apparel. Paul is telling people to present themselves—ALL of them, not just the clothes that they wear—to God as a living sacrifice. It's noble to die for someone, but God already did that for us! Now He wants us to live for Him.

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## 2 Peter 1:20 (Misinterpreted Scriptures)

*Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

**Misinterpretation:** Used to say that there is only one proper interpretation of Scripture, because no "scripture is of any private interpretation."

**Facts:** Peter wrote that "no *prophecy* of scripture is of any private interpretation", "not that no *scripture* is of any private interpretation. Please read on before you accuse me of splitting hairs and trying to get around the Scripture! There is a reason I make that distinction.

If one backs up and reads the passage in context then they will quickly see that Peter was telling people that Jesus truly is the Messiah, and that He witnessed Jesus' majesty personally. He then goes on to say that Jesus was the One who was prophesied about, and that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. In other words, no one can get away with claiming that the prophecies about Jesus are debatable.

Here is the passage in context:

*2Pe 1:12-21 NASB*

*(12) Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.*

(13) *I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder,*

(14) *knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.*

(15) *And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.*

(16) *For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

(17) *For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—*

(18) *and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.*

(19) *So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*

(20) *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,*

(21) *for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

While it is true that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, it is also clear that there are some issues that Christians do not see eye-to-eye on—and that's OK! Look at what Paul wrote in Romans 14:

*Rom 14:1-8 ESV*

(1) *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.*

(2) *One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.*

(3) *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.*

*(4) Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

*(5) One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*

*(6) The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

*(7) For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.*

*(8) If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*

Paul's point is clear: There are some things that people will disagree on, and that is alright. What matters is that a person's faith is in Christ and that they are honestly striving to serve Him. If they are doing that, then "the Lord is able to make [them] stand" (Rom. 14:4 NASB).

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## [James 2:19 \(Misinterpreted Scriptures\)](#)

*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

**Misinterpretation:** Used to say 1) that Trinitarian doctrine is wrong, because there is only one God, and 2) that belief is not sufficient for salvation, because if it were then the

devils would be saved.

**Facts:** Trinitarianism (belief in One *Being*—God—Who exists in three *Persons*) is not the same as tritheism (belief in three supreme beings or gods). In other words, Trinitarians read James 2:19 and agree with the UPC—there is only one God.

Also, just because the devils believe there is one God does not mean that A) they have placed their faith in that one God for their salvation, or B) that they could be saved even if they did place their faith in Christ. The Bible never suggests that devils can be saved. As a matter of fact, Peter says that at least some of them are in "chains of darkness...reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4 NKJV). In other words, placing your faith in Christ for your salvation is much different than just believing in one God. Muslims believe in one god, but that does not make them saved. Salvation requires that a person place their faith in Christ (cf. Acts 2:21, Acts 16:30-31, Rom. 10:13).