

A concise review of...

# Water Baptism in the New Testament

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Restoration Movement Literature

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Colossians 2:12 begins with the phrase, “Having been buried with Him in baptism...” This verse is telling us a beautiful truth that has been marred, manipulated, cast off, ignored, maimed, or transformed by many commentators in times past, both well-intended and evil:

The simple, beautiful truth of this verse is telling us that anyone – absolutely anyone – who has been baptized into Christ has had a genuine inward change (“spiritual circumcision” – see vs. 11 for immediate context, Romans 2:28-29, and even Deuteronomy 10:16, and Jeremiah 4:4) that allows us to love God with “all our hearts and soul” (Deuteronomy 30:6). God has set aside (“made holy”, “consecrated”, or “sanctified”) this person unto salvation, now purposed with a life to serve Kingdom purposes (Romans 8:28), brought into the inheritance of the Kingdom as a child of the King (1 John 3:1ff). So we can see that Colossians 2:12 gives us a beautiful picture of what happens at our baptism!

Instead, what often happens with Colossians 2:12 is a great denominational “tug-of-war”. Many will say that “there is not one drop of water” in Colossians 2:12 (this is also a common assertion about Romans 6:3+4), and say that it is referring to the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit”, not water baptism. Others will say that Colossians 2:12 is merely symbolic, saying our baptism represents certain, already-done facts about our Christian life (“an outward sign of an inward grace”). Still from there others will say that water baptism is already past – that it was a temporary institution – and this verse therefore no longer applies. Which is it? Can we demonstrate with proof that our water “baptism into Christ” actually triggers these spiritual benefits that Paul is talking about in verses 11 and 12?

First, let us consider the author's (Paul's) testimony about his own salvation. Surely this is a reasonable reference point – if Paul is speaking about how another person receives salvation (or how they received it in the past) – surely his own salvation story would reflect what he means:

<b>Saul's Conversion in order from Acts 9, 22 (and other references pertaining)</b>				
<b>What happened at the Damascus Road?</b>	<b>In Damascus</b>	<b>Ananias' Witness</b>	<b>What Paul did in response</b>	<b>Results in Paul's life</b>
Jesus spoke (9:4-6); Saul was blinded (9:8, 22:6, 11); asked who and what to do (9:5, 22:10), Jesus responded to go into the city and wait (9:6, 22:7, 8, 10)	Waited, fasted, prayed for three days (9:9, 11)	Heard (Romans 10:17, Acts 22:13) Ananias' testimony and instructions (9:12, 15, 17, 18, 22:12-16)	Was baptized (9:18, 22:16); broke the fast (9:19), began to witness, preach (9:20, 22), Jesus gave him further instructions (22:17-21)	Forgiveness of sins (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, 38, 22:16, Romans 10:13, 1 Corinthians 1:2), gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), called to be an Apostle (Acts 22:21, Romans 1:1, 1

				Corinthians 1:1)
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**Paul's own testimony** (he himself is testifying in Acts 22; Luke writes about his conversion as part of Acts' chronology in Acts 9) shows that he received salvation just as he described his own: he heard the Gospel from an evangelist (Romans 10:17, Acts 22:13) who Jesus sent (Acts 9:6, 22:7, 8, 10; also see Romans 10:15), who preached to him (9:12, 15, 17, 18, 22:12-16), and Paul responded obediently in water baptism (9:18, 22:16). Paul had already believed upon speaking to Jesus (9:4-6, 22:7-10) and repented (9:5, 22:10); all that was left was a preacher to share the necessity of water baptism with him (22:16). Paul obeyed by being baptized (9:18), breaking the fast (9:19 – it should also be noticed that “breaking a fast” always means the fulfillment or celebration of something – in this case – Paul's conversion), and he began to preach (9:20, 22), following Jesus' further instructions (22:17-21). He could do this because he had received the forgiveness of sins in his baptism (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, 38, 22:16, Romans 10:13, 1 Corinthians 1:2), made effectual through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:18-22), with the prerequisites of faith and repentance fulfilled (9:4-6, 22:10).

Paul's conversion, totally fulfilled upon his baptism, then began his journey in being an Apostle by Christ's command (Acts 9:15, 22:10, 21, Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1).

Paul's conversion is no different than the other accounts of conversions we see in the book of Acts; there is a consistent pattern of each conversion, each ending with the recording of their water baptism:

### 8 Conversions in the Book of Acts

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Native-born Jews</b>	<b>Samaritans</b>	<b>Ethiopian Eunech</b>	<b>Saul (Paul)</b>
<b>Scripture Reference</b>	Acts 2:38-41	Acts 8:4-13	Acts 8:26-39	Acts 9:1-19, 22:1-16
<b>Salvation Elements Recorded (all are assumed)</b>	Heard (2:37), Faith (2:37), Repentance, (2:38), <b>Baptism</b> (2:38, 2:41)	Heard (8:5, 6), Faith (8:6, 8, 12, 13), <b>Baptism</b> (8:12+13)	Heard (8:31, 35), Faith (8:30, 36-38), Confession (8:37), <b>Baptism</b> (8:37-39)	Heard (Acts 9:4-6, 12, 15, 17, 18, 22:7, 8, 10, 12-16), Faith (9:4-6, 22:7-10), Repentance (9:5, 22:10), <b>Baptism</b> (9:18, 22:16)

### 8 Conversions in the Book of Acts, con.

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Cornelius (first Gentile)</b>	<b>Lydia and her household</b>	<b>Jailer and his household</b>	<b>Corinthians (first total heathens converted)</b>
<b>Scripture Reference</b>	Acts 10:1-48	Acts 16:11- 15	Acts 16:30- 33	Acts 18:8
<b>Salvation Elements Recorded (all are</b>	Heard (10:34-44), Believed (10:43-44), <b>Baptism</b>	Heard (16:14), Believed (16:14), <b>Baptism</b>	Heard (16:30-32), Believed (16:30), <b>Baptism</b>	Heard (18:8), Believed (18:8), <b>Baptism</b>

assumed)	(10:47-48)	(16:15)	(16:33)	(18:8)
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The author of Colossians (Paul), who testifies about his own conversion in Acts 9 and 22 (wherein which he was baptized by Ananias – Acts 9:18, for the forgiveness of sins – Acts 22:16), who matches every other conversion recorded in the book of Acts (see chart above), writes Colossians 2:12 with the phrase “buried with Him in baptism”.

The **overwhelming** verdict is that Paul is referring to the same baptism he received (9:18, 22:16), that all of the people recorded in Acts received (some of whom he did personally – also see baptisms he did in 1 Corinthians 1:14-16), and that Jesus Himself exemplified (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:32-34) and commanded (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15-16). Attempting to change Colossians 2:12, Romans 6:3+4, or any other passage clearly speaking about water baptism into anything else is adverse to every example and command of Scripture otherwise.

Undeniably a few verses can be taken out of context and be made *to say anything*; this is precisely what happens when anyone takes a verse out of the context of all of the commands and examples of water baptism above and comes up with an isolated, incorrect theology besides.

Paul says at the tail end of Colossians 2:12, “...God, who raised Him from the dead.” Paul literally and thus clearly says that “God” raised Jesus from the dead. This certainly sounds reasonable, but is Jesus also God? As well, some other Scriptures indicate that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), and other times say that Christ raised Himself from the dead (John 10:17+18). Which is it? Is there a contradiction here?

This is where a clear understanding of the Godhead, or colloquially “the Trinity”, absolutely needs to be had. Paul is absolutely accurate that “God” raised Jesus from the dead in Colossians 2:12 (also see Ephesians 1:19-20). It is also accurate to say that the Holy Spirit had a role (Romans 8:11), and Jesus Himself had the power (John 10:17+18) *because they are all God*.

The question, “Who raised Jesus from the dead?” is just like the question, “Who made the universe?” God did – the Father created (Genesis 1:1), the Holy Spirit was involved in creation (Genesis 1:2), and all of creation was made through Jesus (John 1:1-3). Again, because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all God, there is no contradiction – they, as the one God – were all involved in Jesus’ resurrection.

However, Colossians 2:12 was not written to debate all of the above (yet the need to be clear on these issues is confirmed by the great amount of misinformation floating around). Instead, the phrase, “...God, who raised Him from the dead” is pointing out a fact with regards to our baptism just like Peter does in 1 Peter 3:18-22:

“<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> After being made alive, <sup>[a]</sup> he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— <sup>20</sup> to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. <sup>[e]</sup> It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

The baptism Paul mentions in Colossians 2:12 “buried with Him in baptism” in conjunction with the phrase following, “...God, who raised Him from the dead” tells us with **Peter’s testimony that our baptisms have power not because of the water but because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!** There is nothing special about the water; Scripture never indicates this, and despite many straw men being put up by denominational scholars, no Restoration Movement preacher says that either.

Rather, our water baptism has been endowed with power to forgive sins because Christ’s resurrection gave it that power (1 Peter 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:13-20). Let us not deny the means by which God has given us to experience the forgiveness of sins – water baptism preceded by faith and repentance!

The last phrase in Colossians 2:12 that we will examine is “through your faith in the power of God...”

Immediately preceding this (but already discussed above) is the phrase, “raised with Him”. Together, we understand that our “faith” results in us being raised with Him [Jesus]. Faith, therefore, is absolutely vital to understand. What is “faith” in Scripture?

First, it is no coincidence that in the same verse (Colossians 2:12), immediately preceding is the phrase, “having been buried with Him in baptism”. Faith and baptism have an absolute bond; baptism does not have its effects without faith, and faith does not have its completion or fruition without baptism. Paul makes this clear by including them both in the same verse as dependent on one another and intricately linked together.



Faith in the New Testament is also grossly misunderstood. Since the time of the Reformation, what “faith” is has been under great debate in various scholarly circles. Martin Luther added “alone” in Romans 3:28: “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith [alone] apart from the works of the Law.” Since that time, the majority of theologians have taken Luther’s position, though his own interpretation of what he meant by that varies vastly from the typical “faith only” commentator today.

As an example, Luther (still defending his addition to Romans 3:28), wrote about baptism in his own catechism, published in 1530, part four, titled, “of baptism”:

“This faith clings to the water, and believes that it is baptism, in which there is pure salvation and life...” He continues and writes, “Hence it follows that whoever rejects baptism rejects the Word of God, faith, and Christ, who directs us thither and binds us to baptism...” Again, Luther writes, “Baptism, however, is not our work, but God’s; baptism gives the forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the Devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, just as God’s words and promises declare...”

#### **Interesting Fact:**

Although Martin Luther penned “faith alone” (or, sola fide) in Romans 3:28 and in his catechisms, he never saw water baptism as a work of law, or a work of man, or as incompatible with “faith”. He in fact called water baptism “a work of God” and that “baptism gives the forgiveness of sins” (Luther’s Catechism, Part 4, published 1530). Luther’s followers, past and present, disagree with their founder on the very doctrine he established!

Luther writes much more about baptism but it is outside of our context here to comprehensively cover his writings on it. It can be sufficiently said that Luther believed baptism to be essential and not incompatible with his view of “faith alone”. He saw how many were taking his “faith alone” doctrine and interpreting it to mean “just believe” and tried throughout his ministry to correct this false view.

All the same, Luther made a severe error in “adding” to Scripture regardless; this is forbidden in Revelation 22:18+19. As well, Luther “subtracted” from Scripture because he could not harmonize the book of James with his doctrine, throwing it out of the canon he approved (also forbidden in Revelation 22:18+19). Luther was also anti-Semitic, which is clear from his writings. These three errors would haunt Luther throughout his ministry, and despite all the good he did with much courage, it would be these three chief errors that would throw Christendom into a flurry of denominational division that continues to this day. How God judges Martin Luther as a result is up to God alone.

Besides Luther, Scripture rejects the idea of “faith alone” completely. The only time “faith alone” is mentioned in Scripture is in James 2:24 – “You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.” Needless to say, “just believing” is futile, as evidenced by James 2:19 – “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder”. James kills two birds with one stone with this verse – 1) he affirms monotheism, rejecting polytheism and atheism, and 2) he confirms “faith alone” is no good. Faith must accompany works (James 2:17+20).

<b>Key Fact and Verse:</b>
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The only time “faith alone” is mentioned in Scripture is in James 2:24 – “You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.”

James also says 2:22, “...as a result of the works, faith was perfected.” As we will discover as we continue to study, we cannot reject “works” in a generic sense, but in a specific sense: works of the Law are to be rejected as necessary unto salvation (they are not, and in fact, supplant the very saving nature of the Gospel).

Many will immediately interject and say, “You are proposing a works-based salvation! Galatians 3:2+10 says works cannot save!” Then there is usually the assertion that Galatians 1:6-9 says anyone who believes in “a works-based salvation” is preaching another Gospel and is cursed, etc. At least, this is the criticism this preacher has commonly received when discussing Biblical truth on this subject.

First, Paul and James are both inspired writers of the New Testament so we cannot simply prefer one text over the other (and, perhaps ironically, James wrote first). Second, good hermeneutics demand that we assume Scripture does not contradict, and thus the two passages can be harmonized clearly. Third, Paul and James were contemporaries, preaching the same Gospel. There are not two different messages here; instead, they are addressing [in their own contexts] two different situations to the same end:

Paul, either in Colossians, Galatians, Romans or elsewhere, is constantly battling a group of troublesome believers: the Judaizers. This particular group believed that a Gentile had to first convert to Judaism (and follow the Law of Moses) in order to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

This question was first addressed in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), where the Apostles and elders (Acts 15:2) gathered together in Jerusalem to address this question. The church was still mostly Jewish at this point, so the bent towards this belief was naturally strong (Peter himself erred on this issue and had to be corrected by Paul – Galatians 2:11-21).

Nonetheless, the Apostles and elders jointly decided that following Jewish Law – including circumcision – was not required to be a Christian, Jew or Gentile. They only advised “not consuming blood”, “not eating food sacrificed to idols or from strangled animals”, and “abstaining from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29). Following Jewish Law itself was not necessary.

From there, Paul had to address the issues in the churches where these troublesome people spread (does this not sound like discontent people who leave churches today to go and spread their ill will elsewhere?). Galatians was specifically written to that purpose, and yet we can see their problematic fingerprints where Paul is addressing them in Romans, Colossians, and other books. The point is that Paul was addressing Judaizers, and thus had to constantly say – at various times and in various ways – that the Law of Moses did not save, that it was fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17, Romans 10:4), and enforcement of it upon believers was both “a stumbling block” (Romans 14, especially verse 13) and “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6), which is really “no gospel at all!” (Galatians 1:7)

The greatest evidence of Paul’s sharp criticism of the Judaizers present in various churches causing various troubles is in the multiple Scriptures where Paul specifically refers to “works of the Law” not saving people, but Christ:

Romans 3:20 – “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”

Romans 3:28 – “For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law.”

Galatians 2:16 – “know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

Galatians 3:2 – “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?”

Galatians 3:5 – “So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?”

Galatians 3:10 – “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

Therefore, when we read at the tail end of Colossians 2:12, “through your faith”, we are clearly not talking about obeying the Law of Moses, nor are we talking about “faith only”, as James clearly confronts this equally-bad theology in James 2:14-26, as discussed above. We are talking about obeying Christ:

Christ says in John 9:4a, “We must work the works of Him [God]...” in John 14:21, Jesus says, “He who... keeps my commandments... is the one who loves me...” in John 15:10, Christ

says, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love...” It is clear that Christ expects faithfulness to Him and His commandments.

<b>Key Verse:</b>
John 9:4a - “We <u>must</u> work the works of Him [God]...”

Where does this leave us with understanding what “faith” is, especially in context of Colossians 2:12? Simply put, faith is faithfulness; the two issues are not divorced in the New Testament – they even use the same Greek word – “pistis”.

How else can we be sure that a living faith is a saving faith? Jesus Himself commanded faith – John 3:16. Jesus Himself commanded repentance – Matthew 4:17. Jesus Himself commanded confession – Matthew 16:15-17. Jesus Himself commanded baptism – Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16. Finally, did Jesus command faithfulness? Yes! – John 14:21, Matthew 28:20, among other references. Let us say that if Jesus commands it, it is not optional!

All the same, Jesus gave His Apostles authority to speak in His name the commands that are His (Matthew 10:1, Luke 6:12-16, 9:1). Therefore, what they command and teach is equal to Christ’s commands because their commands and teachings come from Christ. Luke affirmed Jesus’ appointments of the Apostles in Acts 9:15, 13:1-4, 22:14+15, and 26:16 by his own testimony and the testimony of Jesus and others. Paul says he is an Apostle by the authority of Jesus Christ in Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 1:1. Peter affirms Paul’s Apostleship and authority in 2 Peter 3:15+16.

Other Apostles and prophets affirmed Paul’s authority under Christ in Galatians 2:7-9 and Acts 15:22+23. Jesus again affirmed Paul’s

apostleship by affirming the Ephesus' church health in Revelation 2:2 as Paul had served there for three years as their evangelist (Acts 19:1-22, Ephesians 1:1) and his protégé', Timothy, had served there as well (1 Timothy 1:3).

All of the above finally yields to the fact that Christ is the Head of the Church, His Kingdom (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 5:23). He is King and Lord of Lords (Isaiah 9:6, 11:10, John 12:15, 18:37, Acts 2:30, 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, 19:16). If subjects do not have to obey their King, what kind of absurd Kingdom would Jesus have? As well, we as Christians are told to obey those who Christ has set over us, our leaders (elders) – Hebrews 13:7+17. The language is constant – “we must...” Obedience, or faithfulness – or “faith” to and in Christ – is necessary, essential, and without exception.

All of the heroes of “faith” listed in Hebrews 11 were faithful doers, no exceptions:

Abel “offered”, Noah “prepared”, Abraham “obeyed” (mentioned twice), Moses “endured” and “kept”, Rahab “welcomed”, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets “conquered”, “performed”, “shut”, “quenched”, “escaped”, and “put” → in short, not one of them “just believed”.

All the same, Paul writes in Romans 1:17, quoting Habakkuk 2:4 (an Old Testament prophet), saying, “the righteous will live by faith.” Absolutely no one argues that the Israelites had to obey the Law of Moses; yet, Paul refers to this prophecy pertaining to the New Testament church as well. However, Paul was certainly not advocating being faithful to the Law, but to Christ. In each dispensation, the righteous will live “by faith”, or, live “faithfully”. God has always expected obedience, and still does.

<b>Key Fact:</b>
In any dispensation, God has always required obedience, i.e. “faith”.

Endless verses besides show a requirement of faithfulness from God’s children unto their salvation: Acts 6:7 – “a great many... were becoming obedient to the faith.” Acts 14:22 – “...continue in the faith”, Rom. 1:5 – “the obedience of faith...” Rom 3:27 - “law of faith”, Rom. 16:26 - “obedience of faith”, 2 Cor. 5:7 – “walk by faith”, 2 Cor. 8:7, “in faith...abound in this righteous work”, Gal 2:20 – “live by faith”, Gal. 3:11, “live by faith”, Gal. 5:6, “faith working”, Gal. 6:10, “do good... by faith”, Eph. 6:16 – “taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish...”, Col. 1:23 – “continue in the faith”, 1 Thess. 1:3 – “work of faith”, 2 Thess. 1:7 – “work of faith”, 1 Tim. 1:19 – “keeping faith”, 1 Tim. 2:15 – “continue in faith”, 1 Tim. 3:13 – “served well... in the faith”, 1 Tim. 5:8 – “does not provide... has denied the faith”, 1 Tim. 6:12 – “the good fight of faith”, 2 Tim. 2:22 – “pursue... faith”, 2 Tim. 4:7 – “kept the faith”, Heb. 6:11-12 – “same diligence... not be sluggish, but be imitators of those who through faith...”, Heb. 10:22 – “full assurance of faith... our bodies washed with pure water...”, Heb. 10:38 – “live by faith”, Heb. 11:3 – “by faith... the worlds were prepared...”, Jam. 1:3 – “faith produces endurance”, 1 Pet. 1:7 – “your faith...tested by fire”, 1 Pet. 5:9 – “resist him [the devil]... in your faith”, 2 Pet. 1:5 – “applying all diligence, in your faith supply...”, 1 John 5:4 – “whatever is born of God overcomes the world... our faith”, Jude 1:3 – “contend... for the faith”, Jude 1:20 – “...building yourselves up on your most holy faith”, Rev. 2:13 – “did not deny My faith...”, Rev. 2:19 – “I know your faith...that your deeds of late are greater...”, Rev. 13:10



–“the perseverance and the faith”, Rev. 14:12 – “who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”

In conclusion of this discussion of the “faith” that saves, we can conclude without a doubt that we are absolutely not saved by works of Law, but we are saved by obedience to Christ (faith = faithfulness), beginning with belief, then repentance of sin, confession of His name, and baptism into Him for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then, we are to remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), to inherit the prize for which Christ has called us heavenward (Philippians 3:14).

This view lets us harmonize Paul and James, which Martin Luther could do not do. This view lets us in fact harmonize Jesus, Peter, Paul, James, Jude, Luke, and the rest. Let us not “neglect so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3); we must give an account (Matthew 12:36, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 4:13). We must endure (Hebrews 6:4-6); we be faithful (Hebrews 10:26-31); we must not refuse God, we must be thankful to Him, and we must worship Him (Hebrews 12:25-29). To do otherwise should instill great fear as dreadful, inevitable, and permanent judgment will come our way (Hebrews 10:31).

Our final thought for this short study is to picture baptism like a wedding ceremony: to get married, you must obtain a marriage license first. However, you and your fiancé are not really married until you have the ceremony. This is because to be married, the vows exchanged between the two getting married are essential, as is the pronouncement by the official (the minister or the justice of the peace who conducts the ceremony). Without these, a wedding license will expire, the price paid for it wasted, and the process must begin again if marriage is still desired at a later date.

All the same, faith and repentance is your marriage license, but you have not yet completed the ceremony without being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3+4), which is your “marriage ceremony” to become part of the bride of Christ! (Revelation 21:1ff) What a beautiful picture God has given us in water baptism!