

BORN OF WATER

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*What the Bible Really Says
About Baptism*

Third Edition

Rex Geissler

Great Commission Illustrated
Highlands Ranch, CO

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Born of Water

What the Bible Really Says About Baptism

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Dedication



I would like to dedicate this book to the search for doctrinal truth, historical accuracy, and intellectual honesty.

To every Apollos around the world with the zeal to teach the truth, the heart to change their life, and the intellectual honesty to accept a new teaching, that is really a scripturally old teaching.

To my dad and mom, Carl & Marion Geissler, who not only gave me life and the seeds of faith, but also gave me every opportunity in life to be the best I could be.

To my spiritual parents, Harold “Shu” and Carol Shumaker, who taught me the word of God and showed me the true meaning of Christ.

To my incredible wife, Michele, who daily encourages and inspires me. I will always love you!

To my friends, Peter Smith, Dan Rice, and an all generations of the *Boulder Gang* scattered throughout the earth, who have shown me the *best of times* and who continue to lead souls to Christ. You continually show me that the *life that truly is life* is fun and colorful, much more than the black and white bits and bytes of my computer software world.

To my God, who has given me the wellspring of life and never gives up on my failing attempts to serve him.



“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”...After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.

~ Jesus Christ from the third chapter
of the gospel of John

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I want to thank William To for putting together the cover graphics, even during his wedding days. (Thank you also, Tina!) Thanks also go to Dave Ford, Charles Eickele, Dick Gee, Don Splitt Todd Priestley, Alan Strecker, and John Engler for special effects and being great friends when I needed you the most. A heart-felt appreciation goes to Paul Chilson and his dad for their software know-how.

Foreword



Those who study seriously the subject of baptism know that, according to the scriptures and earliest Christian practice, baptism was considered to be the door into the kingdom of God. In the New Testament there are dozens of explicit "baptism passages," in addition to a host of baptismal allusions. In the first century, baptism had not yet been reduced to a mere symbol or confessional ritual. It was vital, universal, and part of the new birth. While many acknowledge this, few have taken the time to delve deeply — into the New Testament and the early sources. After all, such research can be tedious, and, like all research, time-consuming.

I appreciate Rex Geissler for taking the time to do just this. An intelligent man, a hard worker, and a person of faith, Rex has produced a book that will be of enduring value for new disciples, older Christians, those "immersed" in man-made interpretations of baptism, and all interested in weighing and assessing doctrines against the standard of God's Word.

I also appreciate Rex as a friend, loyal to the cause of Christ and to his brothers and sisters in Christ. He is not afraid of the conclusions to which his study leads. Further, Rex is an ideas man — a non-stop stream of fresh approaches, new concepts, and dreams.

I am sure you will enjoy *Born of Water*. It is my pleasure to commend this book to you the reader, while commending Rex Geissler for his labor of love.

Douglas Jacoby
Teacher and Evangelist

Introduction



Water baptism is one of the more controversial subjects in the Christian religion. A biblical understanding of this topic is extremely important to the would-be disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus stated that every person who would follow him should be baptized (Matthew 28:18-20). Yet many times people need to wrestle with the Scriptures in order to accept this teaching. Why does Jesus want people to be baptized? What is the purpose of baptism? Why would God in human form command all nations to be baptized?

Spiritual concepts are sometimes indefinable by nature and often defy human attempts to categorize or legislate them. However, while this book attempts to aid this area, like any human work it has its shortcomings. Being able to understand the Scriptures and being able to teach others is extremely valuable for those who would defend the Christian faith. As the brother of the Lord Jesus states in James 3:1:

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

And as the apostle Peter states:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:14-15)...

In a world where thousands of churches with different doctrinal stands dot the landscape, Christians must dig back into the word of God to find out the “elementary teachings” (NIV) of the New Testament Christians. Only in this way will Jesus’ body, the church, be truly unified. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 4:16, “life and doctrine” (NIV) must be taken together. The biblical response to the gospel of Christ’s amazing and wonderful grace must be crystal clear and

biblically sound. Knowing that Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and was resurrected from the dead for our sins is the beginning of our walk with God in faith. As we begin that walk and spiritual journey, the Bible teaches that people should also learn how to respond correctly to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We should strive to hold to the gospel of Christ, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, saying:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2).

Biblical conversion is important not only to a person's own life, but also in teaching others how to form a personal relationship with God. This book is not an exposé on God's grace through Jesus Christ, faith, repentance, or discipleship as there are already many excellent books written on these subjects. I was prompted to write this book after realizing that there was no unity of understanding on salvation doctrine as many churches teach differently how a person becomes a Christian and how a person should initially respond to God's grace. My intent is not to reduce a focus upon the grace and mercy of God. Rather, my hope and prayer is that all believers worldwide will accept the spiritual importance that the Bible gives to water baptism. I hope and pray that each person opens his or her mind to what the Bible has to say and that each reader finishes reading this entire book. In *Born of Water*, I will show some of the major scriptures on baptism with a short commentary on each. Then I will conclude with general observations on the conversion process. Some very helpful appendixes follow with information on conversion in the church history book of Acts, the rendering of the Greek word "*eis*" in Acts 2:38, discussions of false doctrines about conversion, and the early Christians' consistent view of baptism.

Most of the time I have used the New American Standard (NAS) version of the Bible as its "word for word" quality is generally considered the most accurate English translation. This emphasis on the accuracy of the translation is in keeping with my premise that people must surrender themselves to what the Scriptures say. In a world in which many people have been brought up hearing and being taught the Bible, I also believe that it is important to sometimes take a

fresh look at the Scriptures. This is another reason to read the Scriptures in another translation as it forces the reader to think and consider them more.

Introduction to the Second Edition (1998)

In the Second Edition of *Born of Water*, I have included a new appendix on the Greek text of Matthew 28:18-20 by John Engler (www.barnabasministry.com), enhanced and added more sections in the False Doctrines appendix, added many quotes from the early Christian writers, and updated references and footnotes.

Introduction to the Third Edition (2003)

Sometimes one regrets past words. Such is the case with me. I thank God for his love, grace, and forgiveness. I have re-thought a few of my positions because of their inconsistencies that became apparent over time. And so, after reconsidering former positions, I regret my previous legalistic focus, unnecessary discipleship requirements, and sectarian approach that I have promoted in previous editions. That being said, I absolutely believe there is much to share and consider on this subject as a response to the grace of God Almighty and Christ's love. And to that end, I commit this Third Edition of *Born of Water*.



The Great Commission of Jesus Christ

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20)."

According to this scripture, there is *no option* in regard to baptism! Matthew 28:18 shows that God gave Jesus authority over the universe. Since Jesus has all the authority in the universe, he commanded that all people everywhere be baptized. God always wanted for people to trust him enough to obey him. For example, in the Old Testament God would not heal Naaman the Syrian's leprosy until he humbly obeyed the word of God (2 Kings 5:9-14). God will bless people when they give their lives over to him, including in baptism.

This command was not something new to the more than five hundred Jewish followers who saw Jesus' bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-6) as John the Baptist and Jesus' own disciples had been baptizing people for the past few years (John 4:1). The Jews of the later first century (80 A.D.) discussed ceremonial washings to cleanse themselves from impurity as well as proselyte baptism for Jewish converts.¹ However, the concept that John the Baptist borrowed baptism from Judaism is debatable since no pre-Christian writers nor the New Testament writers nor the Jewish historians Philo and Josephus mention ceremonial washings or proselyte baptism (a

¹ Trent C. Butler, Ph.D., *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 150.

baptism the Israelites used for those Gentiles who were converted to Judaism).²



Qumran Mikvah for Ceremonial Cleansing Immersions

The tradition of washing to clean the inner soul is prevalent in many societies, as seen in the widespread belief in healing pools such as the one used by the paralytic (John 5:4). G. R. Beasley-Murray³ notes in his book *Baptism in the New Testament* that a bath or washing in Leviticus would occur after any kind of discharge from the bowels, from intercourse, from the birth of a baby, from menstruation, or from touching a sick or dead person.⁴ The radical Qumran sect, who descended from the priesthood and who copied the Dead Sea Scrolls, put great emphasis on these purifying rites.⁵ This idea of purification by immersion probably goes back to the priestly

² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 19.

³ G. R. Beasley-Murray was Professor Emeritus of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He spoke and lectured around the world and was the Principal of Spurgeon's College in London, England.

⁴ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

baths prior to offering sacrifices, in verses 4 and 24 of Leviticus 16, where the High Priest was to bathe before approaching God in the Most Holy Place of the temple. The Scriptures show that John the Baptist baptized his disciples for forgiveness of sins in a one-time act whereas the washings at Qumran were daily purifications. (Matthew 3:1-20, Mark 1:1-13, Luke 3:1-22, John 1:19-34, 3:22-26). The Greek word for baptism is *baptizo* meaning to immerse or dip cloth into a vat of dye. The word is derived from an industry of dying cloth in Lebanon. The vats used to hold the different colors of dye, and the process of placing the cloth into the vats was called *baptizo*. As time passed the ritual purity process of immersion began to be known as baptism. The Hebrew word for immersion is *tevilah* and means literally immersing in a ritual bath known as a *mikvah*. Immersion is the act of washing performed to correct a condition of ritual impurity and restore the impure to a state of ritual purity. Immersion was never for the purpose of cleaning or bathing the body. The mikvah/ritual bath was of great importance to the first century Jew. If a community or village had only enough money for a synagogue or a mikvah, the mikvah would be built first. The Torah speaks of numerous things that make a person *Tomeh* or ritually unclean, and a number of processes of purification. The one act required in all purification processes was immersion in the mikvah.

Some of Jesus' disciples were followers of John the Baptist even before his ministry began. One of John the Baptist's disciples was Andrew (John 1:40). Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus and then became a disciple of Jesus himself. For three years the twelve apostles baptized Jesus' disciples. This is shown by John 4:1-2 in Jesus' ministry: "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were)." This last command of Jesus was simply a restatement of the Eleven's purpose which they had already been practicing with Jesus.

Baptism is for every person in every nation, situation and culture around the world. This concept of baptizing "all the nations" was also begun by Jesus humbling himself to be baptized by John the Baptist. Dr. H.F. York⁶ notes about baptism in his book *The Plan Behind the Plea*,

⁶ H. F. York was a minister and teacher in the Christian churches/churches of Christ in the first half of the twentieth century. He took the unity of the church very seriously (John 17:20-23) and dedicated his life to helping people restore the New Testament church.

A subject fraught with so much meaning should obtain much concern from every living soul who has become accountable. Sad but true, many treat the subject of 'baptism' as just a matter of conscience, and not really essential to one's salvation. Our Lord, and our Master, thought it important enough to walk sixty or seventy miles, and was baptized. He said, 'Fulfill all righteousness,' and later enjoined it upon all His followers, commanding it to be done in every nation.⁷

At the time of Jesus' baptism, God showed Jesus to be the Messiah by opening the heavens and sending the Holy Spirit down in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 11:1-11, and Luke 3:3-22). York also notes, "God did not recognize Him publicly as His Son until after He was baptized. A hint to us that God does not recognize us fully until after we are baptized."⁸

Matthew 28:19-20 is also referred to as the *Great Commission*—the purpose for each person's life. The Great Commission was not just a reminder to the apostles of what they had been doing for the past three years. It was also a command for the Jewish disciples to baptize non-Jewish or Gentile people, to teach *all nations*. This "all nations" command was a foreign concept to the Jewish mindset of the Hebrew heritage. Up to the New Testament era, the Hebrews were the one physical race of God (starting with Abraham who settled in Hebron around 2100 B.C.) Jesus was calling the Eleven to open their eyes to a worldwide vision, opening the door to the Gentile people that he had earlier talked about: "And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16). This "all nations" concept is also rooted in the spiritual implication of God's original command to mankind "And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill all the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:28).

Jesus gives a last and most important command before ascending to heaven: to make disciples of everyone around the world who are open to God's word by baptizing them and teaching them to

⁷ H. F. York, *The Plan Behind the Plea* (Diamond, MO: Armokan Publishing Company, 1948), 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

“observe” or “obey” (NIV) everything that Jesus commanded. Read carefully, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them.” A person is instructed to be a follower of Christ through teaching and baptism (see appendix). Before baptism, a person should be taught about God’s grace in our lives and then make the decision to enter into a relationship with Jesus. After Jesus set the impossible bar of perfection to clear in the gospel accounts (far above the Mosaic Law), which demands our lifelong need for the grace of God, a person should study the scriptures about discipleship.⁹ Even though we are taught about God’s love for us, our understanding will always be lacking and always growing. As John Engler shows in *Keeping the Faith*:

“One might ask where the ‘counting the cost’ may appear in these seemingly ‘fast’ instances of baptism. It is most likely that the cost of discipleship to Jesus was readily apparent to those who lived during New Testament times: Jesus had been killed by a conspiracy of the Jewish and Roman leaders; to claim an alliance to him was to incur the immediate wrath of the Jewish leaders and the Romans. This cost—of persecution and other forms of very real and imminent suffering—was readily apparent to all. Thus, counting the cost is not excluded, but probably implicit in becoming a Christian in such circumstances.”¹⁰

The key to becoming a follower of Jesus is starting a person’s life over. Beasley-Murray notes that the early Rabbis immersed a new household slave in the name of “slavery,” and thus he became a slave. When the slave was freed, he was immersed in the name of “freedom” to become free.¹¹ The New Testament emphasizes baptizing “in the name of Jesus Christ,” which shows that the

⁹ Matthew 5-7, 10:24-ff, 18:1-9, 19:16-ff, 21:26-28, 22:34-39, Mark 1:14-20, 3:20-ff, 10:17-31, Luke 6:20-ff, 7:29-30, 9:23-26, 57-62, 11:1-4, 12:13-ff, 13:1-8, 14:25-33, 18:1-8 and John 3:1-21, 4:1-2, 24, 6:25-ff, 7:17, 8:31-32, 12:23-26, 47-ff, 13:34-35, and 14:5-17:ff.

¹⁰ John Engler, *Keeping the Faith* (Long Beach, CA: Great Commission Illustrated, 1997), 204-205.

¹¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 91.

baptized one is beginning a relationship with Jesus. Christ is the one who died for our sins and we should all surrender our lives to him. 1 Corinthians 10 talks about the Israelites being baptized into Moses while today people are baptized into Christ, or under the leadership of Christ. Moses led the Israelites through the “Yam Suf / Sea of Reeds” out of slavery in Egypt and into the wilderness where they were forced to rely on the manna in faith to live on a daily basis and eventually into the promised land. Beasley-Murray considers what some of the early Christians alluded to, that “baptized into Moses” for the Israelites was possibly their version of being “baptized into Christ” since Jesus says that the Israelites’ spiritual meat and drink of the Exodus was Christ (John 6). Beasley-Murray notes, “The one sure inference concerning baptism that can be drawn from this passage is the inability of baptism to save from judgment and bestow the blessings of the kingdom when it is not accompanied by obedience.”¹²



Yam Suf “Sea of Reeds” Possible Location Near Goshen, Egypt

¹² Ibid., 184.

Into My Life

- Have I been baptized?
- If so, why was I baptized?
- What scriptures can I point to in order to show why I was baptized?
- Have I ever studied out *why* Jesus commands every believer in the world to be baptized?
- Do I teach people to be baptized?

Believe and Be Baptized

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned (Mark 16:16).”

It should be noted that Mark 16:9-ff is not included in the earliest manuscripts. However, it was accepted by most early churches and was in line with what they believed and taught to others. True belief in Jesus means that a person trusts Jesus enough to obey whatever he says. Today, belief has been watered down to mean only intellectual assent, believing only that Jesus is the Son of God, instead of *believing* and *obeying* what he said (John 8:31-32, John 14:15, 15:14). However, in the early church, there was no difference between disciples, believers, saints, and followers although each description emphasized a particular facet of the Christian life. Each person has a decision to make in his or her life. It was clear from a person's daily life whether their decision was for or against Christ. It must be reiterated that “belief” in the New Testament meant much more than just a prayer or acknowledgment (John 8:31-32). This does not mean faultless adherence to all commands as nobody could follow this, which are typified by the Mosaic Law and by the additional requirements that Jesus added to it. However, we are quite able to obey his command to be baptized. It is not an extraordinary command but rather simple direction. Just like believing in the scientific truth of gravity means much more in a person's life than simply being able to understand the scientific equations written down on paper. People believe in gravity because they witness it in their lives everyday. Knowledge is good but it must be applied to individual lives in order to truly benefit from it.

Some people attempt to twist Mark 16:15-16 into a pretzel by ruling baptism out of the salvation process. This is poor biblical exegesis. Mark 16:16 is a simple statement by Jesus. Belief and baptism are both extremely important spiritually. The reason that Jesus did not include “and is not baptized” in the second part of Mark 16:16 is twofold: without believing in Jesus a person would have no belief in baptism anyway; and without accompanying faith/repentance (as seen in the other scriptures such as Colossians 2:12, Acts 2:38, etc.) baptism would be just a bath anyway. Also John 3:18 says that whoever does not believe is condemned *already*. Dr. Tom Hedman concludes his commentary on the gospel of Mark, “He [Jesus] reminded them in the most simple of terms that theirs was a life and death mission. Their success meant people being saved from condemnation.”¹³

All of these responses to the good news of Jesus Christ—acceptance, faith, repentance, and baptism—are typically seen in a new Christian around the same time period. However, people should resist the temptation to place a formula or timeline around these responses in a new believer’s life. In western thought, we want to systematically document each step in order. However, in eastern thought that includes biblical texts, the idea of trying to break down something complex into distinct components and then analyzing them to see which is more important is really a foreign concept. Theology is not chemistry. The Scriptures don’t really break everything down and place a timeline on all responses, and it seems like we are on shaky ground when we do so. Faith, repentance, and baptism are somewhat like the trinity (except that there are four of them) in that they are individual concepts but are “one” in terms of their effects.

Into My Life

- Why does Jesus talk about “becoming a disciple” in Matthew 28:18-20 and about “believing” in Mark 16:15-16?
- If I find that I haven’t followed the Bible in the past, will I obey God’s word now? What holds me back from having enough faith to follow Christ?
- If the Bible said to crack an egg and pour it over my head in response to God’s saving grace, would I do it?

¹³ Tom Hedman, *A Life of IMPACT* (Toronto, Canada: New Life Publications, 1992), 232.



Three Thousand Baptized to Begin Jesus' Church

Jesus' preached repentance (Matthew 4:17) from the beginning of his ministry because the Kingdom of heaven was at hand (literally, at the elbow). Repentance is not just a change in behavior from former sins, but a literal turn around in the heart and mind that shows Jesus is the Lord of a person's life. In Luke 24:44-49, Jesus foretold that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in his name beginning at Jerusalem. In Acts the scripture shows the prophecies' fulfillment and the start of the church:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:36-41).

The audience for Peter's sermon was the Jews from Jerusalem and those Jews who had come from different nations for the celebration of Pentecost. This Jewish holiday was the perfect time for God to show people how to enter the kingdom of God since early converts from around the known world could take the word of God back to their homelands to make disciples of "all the nations." It is obvious the listeners were convicted as "they were pierced to the

heart” (Acts 2:37). This occurred after the audience realized that the result of their sin was the crucifixion of Jesus.



Temple Mount Southern Wall Mikvah for ceremonial washings probably used on the first Pentecost Day of Jesus' church (Acts 2)

Some of the crowd was undoubtedly at Pilate's palace fifty days earlier yelling for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified. The leaders of the Jewish people were in the crowd as well (Matthew 27:20). The crowd may have then realized they were under the authority of the Sanhedrin. Since the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death, perhaps the people also felt responsible for the decision of their leaders. The crowd understood and believed that they were responsible, yet they asked the apostles what to do to rectify their dire situation. The people were probably thinking that they were condemned and that nothing could save them for having killed the one and only Son of God. The emotion of their response, "Brethren, what shall we do?" indicates that the crowd might have done anything at this point to get back in Jesus' and God's good grace.

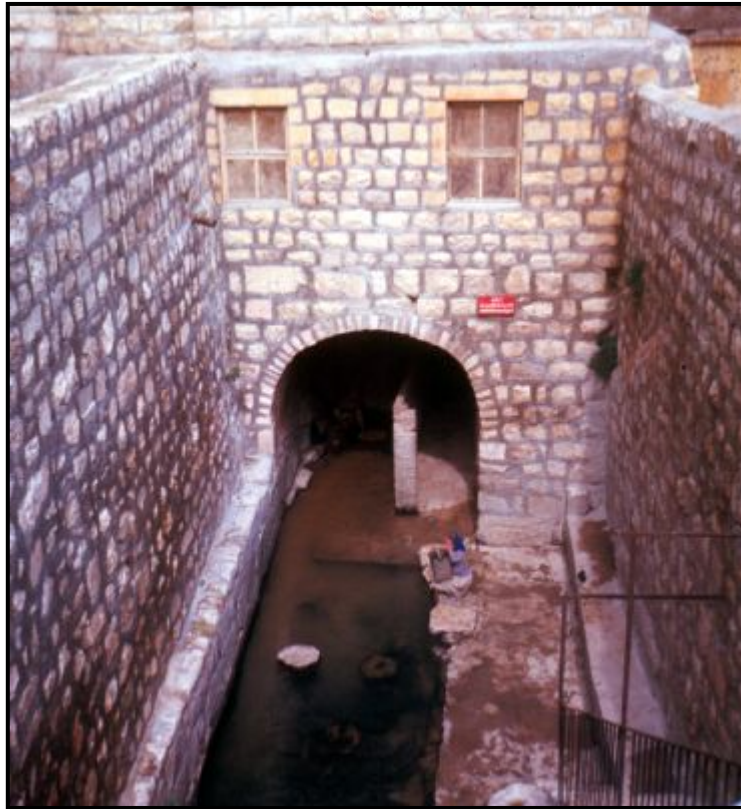
After Peter states the response to the gospel in Acts 2:38 when the people ask, "What shall we do?" Peter continues: "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." Note that this is the *same answer* for every person on the earth (repentance and baptism), close to six billion souls in "all the nations" (Matthew 28:19) today who desire to become a Christian in the biblical fashion.

Some skeptics might say that it would be impossible to baptize three thousand people in one day. True to the Bible record, archaeological finds have uncovered more than enough mikvah cleansing pools on the temple grounds for the three thousand new believers. In fact, T.W. Brents remarks, "There were in Jerusalem the following pools: Bethesda, twenty-two rods long and eight rods wide; Solomon's pool, fifteen rods long and six rods wide; the pool of Siloam, fifty-three feet long and eighteen feet wide, with a smaller pool; Old pool, twenty rods long and thirteen rods wide; pool of Hezekiah, fifteen rods long and nine rods wide; lower pool of Gihon, thirty-six rods long and sixteen rods wide, *now*, in the days of the apostles it covered over four acres."¹⁴

If one person was immersed and after coming out of the water immersed someone else, calculations show that in a minimal amount of time (forty-five minutes to an hour), all three thousand people could have been immersed. Excavations and the healing of the

¹⁴ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 300-301.

paralytic by Jesus (John 9) show some of the pools on the grounds of the Temple in Jerusalem. Today, thousands of modern Jews and Muslims regularly clean themselves near the old Temple site in ritual washings.



Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem

In regard to the actual number of people baptized teacher Douglas Jacoby states that three thousand could have been a Jewish count, which would have included only the males. Counting the males in Jewish society was a very common way to count people, as seen by the six hundred thousand males going through the Red Sea in Exodus, and in New Testament times, the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:21) and the number of believers growing to five thousand (Acts 4:4). Therefore, there were very possibly six thousand to eight thousand men and women in total baptized on Pentecost day. Notice that all three thousand people who responded to the message

were baptized. We cannot say how many of the three thousand baptized on that day had received the possible Jewish proselyte baptism, how many had received John's baptism, and how many had received the baptism from Jesus' disciples; but no differentiation was made by the apostles, for *all* were baptized on Pentecost in the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Peter's sermon in Acts 2:17-41 is also the first *church sermon* of Jesus' universal church. An in-depth study of the kingdom of God, the church, will show that it began on Earth on Pentecost Day. Since Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of God to Peter (Matthew 16:19), one should expect that on the opening day of Jesus' church not only an evangelical tone to Peter's sermon, but also a direct and lasting statement to set the standard of how to get in a right relationship with God. The people had already believed, been convicted and cut to the heart, yet Peter said to them also, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

On this first day of the church, note that 1) *forgiveness of sins* and 2) *new indwelling of the Holy Spirit* are the two things given to the new converts through repentance and baptism. Those two things are also needed in order to be "in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1-11). Dr. H. F. York concurs with this conclusion as he states, "Peter tells us that remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are beyond baptism, on the other side; therefore, according to the testimony of these inspired witnesses, baptism is the dividing line between the world (Kingdom of Nature), and the church (Kingdom of Grace), and in the approach to this dividing line, or before this dividing line can be crossed the sinner must hear the word of God..."¹⁶

Much weight could be put on the fact that the Greek of Acts 2:38 is a clear command. Acts 2:38 teaches that the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit come as a result of repentance and baptism. The sentence is also supported by the scriptures that follow it, which are in total harmony with this command of baptism. Peter's statement shows the necessity of baptism for salvation. The gift of the Holy Spirit is imparted after a person repents and allows himself to be baptized. Of course, without faith and repentance, baptism does not mean anything. But how should a person biblically respond to God's

¹⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 301.

¹⁶ H. F. York, *The Plan Behind the Plea* (Diamond, MO: Armokan Publishing Company, 1948), 50.

love through Jesus? Biblically, a person responds through his belief in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Jesus as Lord, and baptism into Christ. Therefore, *all* are a part of the saving faith and all spiritual response to Jesus' love.

Some religious people will argue that the Greek word "*eis*" (pronounced *ace*), which is translated "for" in "let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the forgiveness of your sins," should really be translated "in order to show." If this hypothesis were true, "*eis*" would mean that baptism was just an "outward sign of an inward grace" which had taken place earlier (when faith first began). Beside other scriptures that contradict this concept, this book includes an appendix of Protestant translators with their translations of the Greek word "*eis*" in Acts 2:38. The Protestant translators agree that "*eis*" means "for" or "so that." It is true that the translation of "*eis*" can mean different things in different contexts in the Greek, but there is no debate among Greek scholars about its translation in Acts 2:38.

Another place in the New Testament where the same phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" occurs is in Matthew 26:28: "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." If one takes the false view of "*eis*" meaning "because of," Jesus would be saying that he did not have to die on the cross. Jesus would be testifying that his blood of the covenant had already been poured out even before his death. And yet the whole purpose of the New Covenant is Jesus' blood and body given for our sins. This contradicts other New Testament teaching on baptism. This view also contradicts the biblical doctrine that Jesus' blood of the covenant was shed on the cross for sins.

Other places in the New Testament where this arrangement of the Greek is found in regard to conversion are Mark 1:1-22 and Luke 3:3-22. These scriptures are about John's baptism, which also was translated, "for the forgiveness of sins." There is no doubt about what Peter said on Pentecost day. There is no doubt what Matthew, Mark, and Luke meant to say in the Greek. Any attempt to distort this biblical doctrine is either a sincere attempt to follow false traditions of men or a smoke screen used in order not to obey and teach the biblical way to become a Christian. Therefore, a person should not be intimidated by a lofty-sounding, theological question like "Do you really know the Greek in Acts 2:38?"

Peter says very clearly, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" Peter had just told those on Pentecost how to be saved after the audience asked what to do. Peter stated to them how to be

saved by responding to the gospel of Christ through repentance and baptism. Those people who believed were baptized and saved by God's grace and the blood of the Lamb!

Into My Life

- According to Acts 2:38, what are the two benefits resulting from baptism?
- Have I made a decision to accept God's love through Jesus?
- Have I made a decision to follow Jesus Christ?
- Make a timeline of the spiritual events in my life. Compare it with the order of events in Acts 2:38 and an appendix on *A Study of Conversion in the Book of Acts*.



Came to faith	Forgiven of sins
Converted	Immersed
Believed	Born again
Received Christ	Repented/Lordship
Prayed Jesus into heart	Joined church
Infant baptized	Holy Spirit baptized
Received Spirit	Saved



In Christ Jesus

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

To Paul the apostle, a person was either “in Christ Jesus” or not “in Christ Jesus.” The New Testament does not allow a compromise position.¹⁷ Similarly, a person either has the Spirit of God or does not have the Spirit of God. A person not “in Christ Jesus” is in his or her own sin. This is why Jesus was adamant that the Jews either believe him or die in their sin. Jesus speaks, “I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He* you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Paul makes a similar statement about being in sin or in Christ, “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:16-17).

Why is there “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”? Individuals are saved by God’s grace through the blood of Jesus, not by anything they can do. No matter what people do on their own, they cannot earn salvation or the forgiveness of sins. The real question is not how many good works does a person need to do to earn salvation, because no one can ever be saved without Jesus Christ. Rather, a person should ask how do the Scriptures state that a person becomes a part of “Christ Jesus” or the global church. Being “in Christ Jesus” refers to having a relationship with God. A great symbol to illustrate this concept of being “in Christ” is that of being married. Just as Genesis 2:24 says “they shall become one flesh,” a person

¹⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 276.

(spiritually speaking) marries God when he or she commits his or her life to him, becoming one with Jesus (Mark 2:19, John 3:29, Romans 7:4, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:23-33, Revelation 19:7-9, 21:1-2, 9). This marriage ceremony occurs at the point of baptism, where people are “baptized into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:26-27) and become a part of Jesus’ universal church, the body of Christ. Unfortunately, there is some discussion about the wonderful benefits of “being in Christ Jesus” without ever discussing what the Bible teaches people about “getting into Christ Jesus”? Romans 6 discusses “getting into Christ Jesus” directly:

May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:2-5).

Many people are also very confused between “works for salvation” and “works because of salvation.” Ephesians 2:10 clearly states that people are created “in Christ Jesus” to do good works. This is completely different from the Jews being circumcised and then being required to obey all of the Old Testament laws and the sacrifice system for their entire lives in order to reach salvation. Some people claim that baptism is a work. To compare allowing oneself to be immersed in water on a one-time basis with the daily obedience and the sacrifice system of Judaism is not accurate and a gross distortion of the reality.

Although baptism is a thing that is done, it is not a work of merit and shows that the person is trusting in God to save him or her. Many in the religious world have been exposed to false teaching about baptism resulting in a untrusting view of baptism having anything to do with man’s salvation. For instance, the Roman Catholic church teaches that baptism is a work of merit. In other words, the act itself merits salvation whether any faith exists behind the act or not as the following Catholic publication quotes: “Valid reception does not require faith...Therefore, an unbeliever who so desires may be validly

baptized even though he has no faith.”¹⁸ Likewise, Catholic Sources teach one need not even be conscious when he is baptized, “Baptize any person found unconscious and in a dying condition.”¹⁹ However, just because one religious group goes to one extreme does not mean that others should go to the opposite extreme. Throughout religious history, one can find many examples of how people overreact to one doctrine or another. The evangelical world has done this with the beautiful spiritual significance of baptism. My intent is not to lower the unbelievable grace of Christ Jesus but to simply teach what the Bible teaches.

If someone still insists on saying that baptism is a “work,” how then is confession with one’s mouth not also a “work”? How can saying a prayer not be a “work”? Why is firing the neurons in your brain while making a decision to follow Jesus not also a “work”? These are all physical works, but not the works of the Jewish law that can never make a person righteous. They are acts of faith in Jesus Christ because there is no visible Temple of God to be baptized into, no visible Savior to confess the name of, no visible race of people to be born into, and no visible meeting place to worship. In fact, baptism is the most passive act of the typical biblical salvation process including gaining faith, repenting of sins, confessing Jesus as Lord, and being baptized into Christ because another person is doing the “work” of immersing the person’s body in water. Irregardless, this discussion is almost pointless since it is God who is doing the real work of forgiving the person of his sins through the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.

David Berçot²⁰ in his book *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* gives some great insight into how salvation through grace works. Berçot writes:

Like Schaeffer, most evangelical writers give the impression that the belief that our own merits and works

¹⁸ O.C. Lambert, *Catholicism Against Itself* (O.C. Lambert: Winfield, AL), 2:218-222.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁰ David Berçot is a practicing title attorney, earning his livelihood from interpreting documents. With keen insights and with writing in a fluid, readable style, Berçot explains the key doctrines of the early Christian writers and common sense interpretation techniques in several books such as *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?*, *Common Sense* and *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*.

affect our salvation was something that gradually crept into the church *after* the time of Constantine and the fall of Rome. But that's not really the case.

The early Christians universally believed that works or obedience play an essential role in our salvation. This is probably quite a shocking revelation to most evangelicals. But that there's no room for doubt concerning this matter, I have quoted below (in approximate chronological order) from early Christian writers of virtually every generation— from the time of the Apostle John to the inauguration of Constantine...

In fact, *every* early Christian writer who discussed the subject of salvation presented this same view...

Does This Mean That Christians *Earn* Their Salvation By Works?

No, the early Christians did not teach that we earn salvation by an accumulation of good works. They recognized and emphasized the fact that faith is absolutely essential for salvation, and that without God's grace nobody can be saved...

You may be saying to yourself, "I'm confused"...

Our problem is that Augustine, Luther, and other Western theologians have convinced us that there's an irreconcilable conflict between salvation based on grace and salvation conditioned on works or obedience. They have used a fallacious form of argumentation known as the 'false dilemma,' by asserting that there are only two possibilities regarding salvation: it's either (1) a gift from God or (2) it's something we earn by our works.

The early Christians would have replied that a gift is no less a gift simply because it's conditioned on obedience. Suppose a king asked his son to go to the royal orchard and bring back a basket full of the king's favorite apples. After the son had complied, suppose the king gave his son half of his kingdom. Was the reward a gift, or was it something the

son had earned? The answer is that it was a gift. The son obviously didn't earn half of his father's kingdom by performing such a small task. The fact that the gift was conditioned on the son's obedience doesn't change the fact that it was still a gift.

The early Christians believed that salvation is a gift from God but that God gives His gift to whomever He chooses. *And He chooses to give it to those who love and obey him.*

Is their understanding really that strange? I so often hear evangelical Christians say that welfare should only be given to those persons who are truly *deserving*. When they say that certain poor persons are "deserving," do they mean that welfare constitutes wages earned by such persons? Of course not. They still consider welfare to be a gift. Simply because a person is selective in his giving, it doesn't change the gift into a wage...

As surprising as all of this may be to you, what I'm about to tell you is even more bizarre. There was a religious group, labeled as heretics by the early Christians, who strongly disputed the church's stance on salvation and works. Instead, they taught that man is totally depraved. That we are saved solely by grace. That works play no role in our salvation. And that we cannot lose our salvation once we obtain it.

I know what you're thinking: This group of "heretics" were the real Christians and the "orthodox" Christians were really heretics. But such a conclusion is impossible. I say it's impossible because the group I'm referring to are the gnostics.²¹

Today, most evangelicals are not Gnostics in the complete sense but they do follow false doctrines such as "we are saved by grace through faith *alone*" that the early church did not follow. Martin Luther literally added the word "alone" to his translation of Ephesians

²¹ David Berçot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1989), 57, 60, 62, 66.

2:8 in order to justify his position in his overreaction to the Catholic Church's wrong doctrines.

...and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you (Romans 8:8-11).

The second sentence of Romans 8:8 indicates that people must have the Spirit of God. So, in order to be "in Christ Jesus" Romans 8:1, 8-9, and Acts 2:38 teaches that two essentials are needed: 1) *forgiveness of sins*; and 2) *the Holy Spirit*.

Into My Life

- Based solely on the Bible, at what point do the Scriptures imply our sins are forgiven?
- Based solely on the Bible, when does it imply people receive God's Holy Spirit?

Baptized Into Christ Jesus

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin (Romans 6:1-7).

Romans 6:1-7 shows that baptism is an excellent and incredibly beautiful representation of the gospel itself presented in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ). But in the Bible, baptism is never referred to as simply a symbol, which some Protestants teach. Baptism is more than what some religious people call, “an outward sign of an inward grace.” Paul equates death to sin by being baptized into Christ Jesus (“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?”) as a fact, not as a symbol or a sign.

Being “baptized into His death” means that one’s spiritual body of sin is immersed in the life-saving blood of Jesus. The focus is on Jesus’ death and how a person’s old self was crucified with him. Because Jesus was physically resurrected from the dead, we too are raised out of the burial waters of baptism to live a God-filled life. In the King James Version of Romans 6:5, it states that we are *planted* in the likeness of Jesus’ death. This causes us to recall the seed that Christ said had to die in order to bear fruit and live again.

Note that Paul also talks about dying with Christ in Colossians 2:20, and in 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul speaks about the old man being gone and the new man being alive. The point of faith, repentance and baptism is the threshold to the new life in Christ. When talking about this spiritual conversion of a person, it is hard to forget the similarities of the Great Commission in the New Covenant—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them”—of Matthew 28:19. And the following scripture penned by Paul the apostle adds to an individual’s understanding:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me (Galatians 2:20).

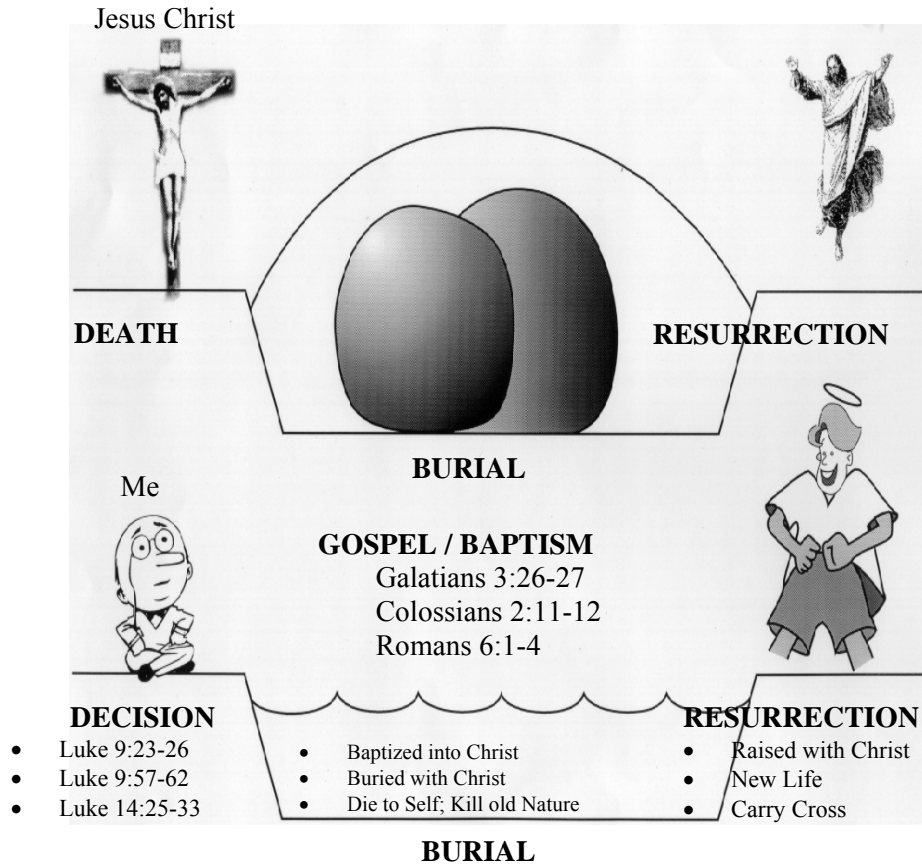
Paul says we must be “in Christ Jesus” to be saved (Romans 8:1). Notice that the apostle Paul says that we are “*baptized into Christ Jesus*,” not “*believed into Christ Jesus*” nor “*prayed into Christ Jesus*” or “*repented into Christ Jesus*.” This is a crucial point.

There are no scriptures in the Bible that say “into Christ Jesus” except those referring to baptism. The writers of the New Testament use the term “in Christ Jesus” fifty-five times, “in Christ” forty times and “in the Lord” fifty-three times to designate a faithful person in a right personal relationship with God. There are only two scriptures that talk about getting “into Christ Jesus,” both of which use the phraseology “baptized into Christ” (Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:26-27). There is no other biblical way to get into a relationship with God—into the body of Christ, his church. The benefits of baptism are two-fold: the person is “in Christ Jesus” with the forgiveness of sins and God’s Holy Spirit lives in him. John the apostle confirms this when he writes “Blessed are the dead who die *in the Lord* from now on!” (Revelation 14:13, italics mine).

When Jesus returns in the *second coming*, he will look for those who look like himself, who are clothed with Christ. Will Jesus acknowledge a person who is clothed with sin or one who has clothed himself with Christ. What happened when Jesus died? Our sins were piled on Jesus. Jesus said when a grain of wheat dies, a new plant is born. Compare one’s sinful nature’s death with being born again (John 3:5). Note the beauty of the complete gospel in this dying of the seed compared with Jesus’ death. From the gospel’s definition in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 and from Romans 6:1-7, we see not only Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection from the dead, but also the new believer’s death to sin by being baptized into Christ Jesus’ death through burial in the waters of baptism (full immersion). As Jesus’ body was laid down in the tomb and raised from the dead, people too may live a new life, resurrected not only from sin itself but also from the sinfulness of their previous life. The illustration of death and burial may show why God picked baptism as the entry point to become a Christian. Baptism is a great example (a symmetrical representation) of the gospel itself, the point a person contacts the blood of Jesus Christ. And especially in the New Testament world where scriptures were not together yet, seeing people “baptized into Christ” showed believers and non-believers alike a beautiful representation of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

G. R. Beasley-Murray repeats this idea of the connection in baptism between repentant sinner and loving God as he states, “Here is an aspect of baptism to which justice has not been done in the Church since its early days: baptism as a means of prayer for acceptance with God and for full salvation from God, an ‘instrument of surrender’ of a man formerly at enmity with God but who has

learned of the great Reconciliation, lays down his arms in total capitulation and enters into peace...The loss of this element in baptism is grievous and it needs to be regained if baptism is to mean to the modern Church what it did to the earliest Church.”²²



²² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 102.

Into My Life

- In what biblical context is baptism considered a symbol?
- How is baptism not merely a symbol?
- What does it mean to wear Christ's name?
- How does wearing Christ's name relate to being an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)?
- How could a wedding ceremony and baptism be similar?

Buried With Jesus in Baptism

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:9-14).

Faith and baptism are working together in this scripture. Baptism is not merely something done by men, but rather a spiritual work ordained, directed, and accomplished by God himself. One can almost see the *spiritual surgeon*, Jesus, at work. While one is under the waters of baptism, Jesus is carving off the sinful shell of their carnal, worldly nature. Circumcision in Colossians 2:10 is not just cutting off a little flesh, but the complete "removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," a gruesome and painful type of death. It should be remembered that circumcision was the initiation of becoming a true Hebrew in the Jewish culture. In a similar way, baptism is the initiation ceremony into becoming a Christian. Gene Edwards helps people understand this death, burial and resurrection a

little better by visualizing baptism in the Jordan River, “It meant the end of life, the cessation of everything. Everyone awaiting baptism stood on the eastern bank, which was a foreign land. There they stepped into the water and disappeared...there to die. But each came up out of the water and stepped onto the western bank, safe within the border of the promised land, there to begin a new life with God. This simple drama was unforgettable.”

Faith must also be present for a valid baptism, as Paul writes: “you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). In John 4:1-2, we see that both John the Baptist and Jesus were having their disciples baptized, which means that the people were old enough to learn, understand, and decide for themselves whether to repent (make Jesus the Lord of their life) or not. How can a person then condone infant baptism? Surely, if God had meant for infants to be born again, he would have given them the ability to reason and decide for themselves which path they would follow. Yet, *infants do not decide* to “Repent, and let each of you be baptized” (Acts 2:38) through their faith in Jesus Christ. The infants’ parents decide everything for them: when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat, where to sleep and where to live. To make “infant baptism” a biblical doctrine, one would expect God would have given at least one specific example. Jesus said that such as these children were of the kingdom of God and thus right with God.

Logicians use the terms necessary and sufficient to describe conditions that must exist for a given event to occur. A necessary condition is a circumstance that must exist for that event to occur. For example, having gas in one’s car is a necessary condition for it to run. However, gas in the tank is not a sufficient condition for the car to run. The engine must also be connected to the gas tank, the car must have wheels, the ignition must be turned on etc. A sufficient condition is a circumstance in which a given event must occur. This book argues that faith, repentant hearts and baptism are necessary conditions for salvation and all three together become a sufficient condition for the New Covenant salvation.



Ancient Mardin Syrian Orthodox Infant Immersion Baptistry



Unless One is Born of Water and the Spirit

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 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 3:3-6)."

John 3:3-6 is an extraordinary statement by Jesus to one of the leaders of Israel. Jesus told Nicodemus that a man cannot see the kingdom of God "unless one is born again." Beasley-Murray notes that we can hardly imagine a more shattering sentence to the person characterized as "the teacher of Israel" (v. 10).²³ The disciples of Jesus were constantly astonished at Jesus' words (John 6:25ff).

"Born again" can also be translated "born from above." This suggests a divine act, not a human or earthly one. There is a deep meaning in this statement and there is a double meaning. Sometimes the last words are translated "born from above" and sometimes "born again". It comes from a root meaning of something like "from the very first or from the top", so possibly both "from above" and "over again from the beginning". It appears to have been deliberately ambiguous. The course of the conversation depends upon the ambiguity. Nicodemus first takes it to mean "a second time"; Jesus responded with the meaning "from above", in the sense being born of the Spirit who comes from above, from God.

In John 3:3-6, we see Jesus further explain "born again" (v. 3) as "born of water and the Spirit" (v. 5). Another command to be

²³ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 102.

baptized with water is the example of the first Gentile disciples in Acts 10:44-48. In this situation, Peter actually commanded Cornelius and his family that they had to be baptized.

The early Christians often used John 3:3-5 as a biblical proof text for baptism. This can be seen in an appendix to this book. The early church was convinced that John 3:3-5 was talking about Christian baptism. Some religious people try to say that Jesus was speaking of physical birth, but a closer look at the scripture reveals that Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about spiritual concepts. In addition, placental fluid is not water. John, the author of this gospel, wrote two chapters earlier about physical birth referring to it as “of blood,” not “of water” (John 1:12-13). Jesus was not so simple-minded as to say something like, “Unless you are a homo-sapiens or born physically, you cannot be saved.” It goes without saying that a human has to be born to be saved.

In fact, after Jesus’ discourse on spiritual re-birth (John 3:1-21), he immediately starts baptizing people, “After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized” (John 3:22-23). So after Jesus tells Nicodemus “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” he puts this into practice by going out with his disciples and baptizing people. This discussion of Jesus and John baptizing continues from John 3:22-4:1. After Jesus’ discussion on being born of water and the Spirit, after Jesus is baptizing more disciples than John, and after John the Baptist is also immersing people continually, the third chapter in John could be considered the “baptism chapter” similar to the “love chapter” (1 Corinthians 13) or the “faith chapter” (Hebrews 11).

Although some would argue that baptism before the cross of Christ was completely different than after the cross, there is an obvious consistency of believers being initiated into the faith through baptism, both before the cross and after the cross. Before the cross, believers placed their faith in their leader. John pointed the way to Jesus for those who were baptized by John. And Jesus pointed the way to the future for those baptized by Jesus or his disciples, the cross and resurrection.

Some religious people ignore John 3:3-5 asserting John 3:16 in its place. Which is more important, belief or baptism? Both work together and T.W. Brents shows the problem with choosing between

scriptures.

Does any one believe that Jesus intended to contradict this statement by what he said in the fourteenth to sixteenth verses? That is, "I know, Nicodemus, that I did say that a man must be born of water and of the Spirit, or into the kingdom of God he should not go; but I was wrong in that, for he that believeth on Me has everlasting life, whether born of water or not." Jesus had fully explained the new birth to Nicodemus, and he did not believe the testimony – "you receive not our witness;" hence Jesus appeals to an incident in Jewish history with which, as a teacher of Israel, Nicodemus was bound to be familiar, to confirm the fact that He was the promised Messiah, through Whom alone the world could hope for eternal life...Were the bitten Israelites cured by faith alone? They might have believed that the brazen serpent was on the pole, and they might have believed in the power of God to heal them, yet had they regarded the *look* as non-essential, and acted accordingly, they would have died without remedy. *They had to do the thing commanded or die.*²⁴

We see the washing and cleansing power of baptism in Titus 3:5-7, Ephesians 5:26, and 1 Corinthians 6:11. In fact, the apostles John and Peter use the new birth concept frequently in their writing (1 Peter 1:3, 1:23, 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 5:4, 5:18). Consider the following scripture (as Beasley-Murray concluded about Titus 3:5) that "No statement of the New Testament, not even John 3:5, more unambiguously represents the power of baptism to lie in the operation of the Holy Spirit."²⁵

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7).

²⁴ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 440-441.

²⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 215.

One theological view of this regeneration suggests that God has bestowed this power in the act of baptism or in the water itself. This view, holding that faith is not needed, is held in Catholic-Lutheran dogma and is called *baptismal regeneration*. Protestants typically maintain a *faith-only* view, where just belief or confession is enough for regeneration. Both views are overreactions. What the Bible really says is that both are promote regeneration by God. This concept should be termed *baptismal repentant regeneration*²⁶, indicating that the person, a repentant adult who can confess “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9), is regenerated by God at the time of his baptism. This need for faith at baptism agrees with what Paul states in Colossians 2:10-12, “having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God.”

Please also notice the similarities in the following scriptures.

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned (Mark 16:16).

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. And even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip (Acts 8:12-13)...

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 (John 3:5).”

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5)...

²⁶ *Baptismal repentant regeneration* was a term coined by Steve Staten, teacher in the Chicago Church of Christ. Steve is currently working on a book titled *The Sinner's Prayer* that will be the first historical investigation into the origins of the modern “Born Again” movement.

The spiritual rebirth, being born again, must occur for a person to start his or her life living with and for God. Douglas Jacoby notes this theme throughout 1 Peter in his commentary *Life to the Full*:

“Rebirth” (1:23): We were not reborn through perishable seed (human sperm), but through the seed, the word of God (Luke 8:11), which is imperishable. This happens at baptism. There is no other way to be reborn. The modern doctrine of “pray Jesus into your heart” originated in the last century in the United States; there is not a shred of evidence in the Bible to support it! Don’t be sentimental... We need to interpret Scripture carefully, especially when it concerns crucial issues like how to be saved.

Compare these three passages: 1 Peter 1:3, 1:23, and 3:21. What do you see? Rebirth through the resurrection, rebirth through [obeying] the word of God, and salvation by baptism through the resurrection. The three passages are complementary, not contradictory. There is only one way to be saved: the way the Bible says!

Since the Word preached to us is eternal, we are born again and receive eternal life in the waters of baptism (John 3:5; Titus 3:5).²⁷

Into My Life

- How much have I honestly wrestled with the Scriptures about doctrinal issues?
- Am I open to being wrong about my current views or learning new things about anything in the Bible?
- Am I open to being wrong about my current views or learning new things about baptism?
- How do I respond when challenged by a spiritual person to consider another possibility?
- Who or what holds me back from accepting what the Bible teaches?

²⁷ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 71-72.

- When did I start my life all over to live every moment for Jesus Christ?
- How was I born from above and from the spirit?
- Can I have the best of both worlds, where I accept what the Bible teaches and still praise God for all the people who he has placed into my life and helped me grow spiritually?

‘What Prevents Me from Being Baptized?’

And the eunuch answered Philip and said, “*Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?*” And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “*Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?*” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him (Acts 8:34-36, 38).

The eunuch showed a strong desire to be baptized. This was not just an act of obedience. Philip told him solely the good news or gospel of Jesus in v. 35. The eunuch himself brought up baptism, v. 36. Now where could he have learned that? There is only one possibility. Baptism was included in the good news about Jesus that Philip explained. You just cannot separate baptism from the good news (in Greek “evangelion”). Philip the evangelist did not separate baptism from the good news or gospel message.

Since they were on the desert road, the court official of the Queen probably had not only a chariot, a driver, and a copy of the Scriptures, but also would have needed a supply of water to survive physically. If baptism only meant sprinkling or pouring, why would Phillip have not sprinkled the eunuch with canteen water? The reality is that the eunuch was excited about the water they had come upon to survive *spiritually*. Or if baptism meant sprinkling, why not scoop up a handful of water at the edge? The bottom line is that the scripture says Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water. Also notice that in the New Testament, baptisms were performed spontaneously and were not reserved for a particular time of the day, week, religious holiday (Easter, Christmas), other people to be present, or location. Even into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. when “Holy Water” became popular, the Catholic

church immersed infants. For example, in the Piza Baptistry (next to the Leaning Tower of Piza in Italy) and others they collected rain water until there was enough captured in order to immerse infants by dipping them upside down three times.

Into My Life

- No matter what my physical or spiritual age is, am I humble enough to learn more about Jesus’ teachings?
- Do I accept spiritual teaching from the Bible or do I rationalize my life?
- Was I baptized when I first started following Jesus?
- If not, why did I wait?
- If I was previously baptized, did I really understand baptism’s importance in the good news of Jesus’ message?

Wash Your Sins Away

“For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name (Acts 22:15-16).”

Saul/Paul surely had faith in Jesus before he was baptized and had his sins washed away. Note that Saul saw the resurrected Christ himself. The glory of God himself blinded Saul’s sight. Saul called Jesus “lord” in Acts 22 verses 8 and 10 yet he was still not forgiven at that point according to Ananias. Saul was so impacted by the experience that he decided to pray continually. Saul also fasted from both food and water for three days. After viewing the resurrected Christ, being blinded, calling Jesus “Lord” multiple times, praying continually, and fasting for three days, how could Saul not be forgiven and have his sins washed away yet?

According to the office of Dr. Richard Wexler M.D., the three day fast from food and water (whether a complete seventy-two hours or forty-eight hours plus a few, similar to Jesus’ entombment)

combined with hot weather or sickness could have put Saul near physical death. An average adult in stable circumstances can survive without food and water for only about seven days. Ananias tells Saul to focus on his spiritual life by telling him how to get his sins forgiven, stating, “And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins.”

If a “sinner’s prayer” or just “accepting the Lord” or “receiving Christ” were enough to become a Christian, one would think that after three days of constantly seeing the resurrected Christ replayed in his mind’s eye, of prayer, and of fasting, the apostle Paul’s sins would have been forgiven. Yet, Luke shows that Paul did not wait until after eating and drinking the physical life-saving food and water (Acts 9:18-19). Instead, Ananias tells Saul to be baptized and to have his sins washed away. Ananias implies that Saul needs to make a response to the love of Jesus and do something to show his acceptance of the grace of God. Notice that Jesus told Saul to go to Damascus and that Ananias would tell him “what he must *do*” (Acts 9:6 emphasis mine).

This coincides with what Paul taught the Corinthians about the incredible spiritual power of Christian baptism to wash away an individual’s sins. Note the Trinitarian emphasis as stated in Matthew 28:19, “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” similar to the following scripture: “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revelers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without

stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:12-14)...

Confession at the time of baptism is also another great Bible study. This shows how the confession ties to baptism in *baptismal repentant regeneration* (Titus 3:5-7). Douglas Jacoby makes another great point to be considered when he states in *Life to the Full*:

The confession "Jesus is Lord" is made (Romans 10:9). No further questions are needed.

The baptismal verse Acts 8:37 ("Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The Eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'") is an insertion into the Greek text appearing in no manuscript before the sixth century and is not present in the best translations for that reason. Yet since it appears in the KJV and other versions, several groups have unwittingly been influenced by it in their pre-baptismal confession: "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? What is your good confession?" (the "two questions"). But do we really have a right to make such creedal requirements when there is no biblical precedent? The only biblical prerequisites for baptism are faith, repentance and the classic Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9; 1 Timothy 6:12). No other questions, no matter how well intended, are binding.²⁸

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Hebrews 10:23)

Although Acts 8:37 did not appear in the biblical manuscripts before the sixth century, Irenaeus (180 A.D.) quoted the story with this verse present in his *Against Heresies*, showing that this was indeed a very early Western addition to the original text from Luke.

Beasley-Murray points out about Timothy:

...the setting by the author of 'You made the good confession' in parallelism with 'the eternal life to which you

²⁸ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 152.

were called' shows fairly conclusively that the confession was made by Timothy at the beginning of his Christian life, when he responded to the call of God made through the gospel. Consequently there is fairly general agreement that the context of the 'glorious confession' made by Timothy is that of his baptism.

The making of the baptismal confession 'before many witnesses' calls attention to the publicity of baptism, which ensures a fulfillment of the demand of Jesus that would-be disciples of His must not fear to confess Him before men (Mt. 10.32). Michel points out two further aspects of the baptismal confession: its binding obligation, since the confession involves a vow of obedience that must not be broken; and its finality, for confession of the Son of Man before men will be acknowledged by the Son of Man's confession of the disciple before God in judgment (Mk. 8.38). Both these aspects appear in our passage. The eschatological element is alluded to in the appeal to Timothy to lay hold of the life eternal to which he was called. The binding nature of the obligation undertaken in the baptismal confession is presumed in the call to fight the good fight of faith begun at that time...²⁹

Notice also that Paul quotes the reference to Jesus' confession before Pontius Pilate (1 Timothy 6:12-14) which acknowledged the divine kingship of Christ. Supporting the idea of Jesus' disciples not being afraid to acknowledge him is John 12:42-43: "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God." This concept of acknowledgment of Jesus before men is also seen in Luke 9:26, "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." The confession scriptures of conversion coincide with repentance and baptism in Romans 10:9, 2 Timothy 2:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:12-14, John 12:42-43, Luke 9:26 and Acts 22:14-16.

²⁹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 205.

Into My Life

- Why would Paul teach converts differently from the way he became a Christian?
- What did Ananias’ state to Paul specifically to get rid of his sins?



Baptism Now Saves You

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:18-22).

1 Peter was written in 64 A.D.³⁰ At this time, Peter says “baptism now saves you.” This statement is very explicit and straightforward. Just as the old time gospel preacher says, water is in the plan. But there is more to see in this picture.

Theologians refer to the ark of Noah as a type of Christ (a divinely ordained illustration based on an Old Testament subject that foreshadows a future idea in the New Testament). While a sinful world was covered and destroyed in water, God saved Noah’s family through the flood by the ark. While a person’s sinful nature is covered and destroyed in water, God saves him or her through the flood of baptism by Jesus’ death and resurrection. While the ark lifted the followers of God out of the water, the person who desires to follow God today is also lifted out of the water. Peter does not say baptism symbolizes or resembles what has happened in the past. Instead, Peter says, “baptism now saves you.” In baptism, people *appeal* to God for a clean start. The flood or deluge of Noah’s ark destroyed all the wickedness in the world. In a similar way, baptism destroys the

³⁰ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 62.

wickedness and sin in a person's life. The deluge of Noah started the world all over again. The flood of baptism gives the baptized person a new start on life ("born again" in John 3:3). Just like the resurrected Christ, Paul says in Romans 6:1-4 that those baptized "too might walk in newness of life."

The imagery and allusions of Noah's Ark, the Noahic flood, and the baptismal flood is amazing. There was one door to enter Noah's Ark (Genesis 6:16) and be saved from destruction. In the same way, there is one door to God through Jesus as he says, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:7). Jesus also said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). The ark bore the brunt of the flood waters while Jesus bore the sins of mankind. As the eight were saved by entering and staying in Noah's ark, so we also are saved by entering into (being baptized into Christ) and trusting in Jesus' blood. Another allusion to judgement and the Genesis account of the Noahic flood and those who perished is located in Matthew 24:37-40. A person can only imagine the fear of those knocking on the door of the ark while the floodwaters rose as in Luke 13:23-28 below.

And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there {just} a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from.' "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.' "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.

Douglas Jacoby discusses 1 Peter 3:18-22 as follows:

Some of us are so used to plucking a few words out of verse 21 to talk about baptism that we totally miss Peter's

imagery: The water in the days of Noah was that which lifted the ark and separated it from the sinful world. In the same way baptism lifts us upwards through the resurrection of Christ and separates us from the filth of the world. The Flood destroys the world, but brings the faithful few into a whole new world. Baptism, similarly, destroys the old sinful nature and brings us upward into a new life.

About the “conscience” (1 Peter 3:21), we read “...as an *appeal* to God for a good conscience” (NRSV, emphasis added). Some translations read “pledge of a good conscience” (NIV), but that is hardly the meaning of the original word (*eperotema*). Possible meanings in the Greek are “request” and “*appeal*.” The only reason to translate it “pledge” is to obscure the connection of baptism with forgiveness of sins. You can’t *pledge* to God something you don’t yet have, but you can *appeal* to God for a good conscience, which God provides when your sins are washed away.

Finally, Peter speaks bluntly: “baptism saves you.” That is what Peter explicitly says. Let theologians quibble, the truth speaks for itself. Certainly baptism without faith doesn’t save you, and baptism without repentance doesn’t save you. But when baptism is *into* Christ and done with faith and repentance, it saves you! So one can no more be saved without it than Noah and his family could have been brought into a clean new world without a flood and an ark.

Baptism is no source of boasting for us. It is of Christ. It connects us to Christ. It saves because of Christ and his death and resurrection. But precisely because it is *of* Christ, baptism saves us!³¹

Some scholars believe that the whole book of 1 Peter may have been a baptismal treatise for new converts. Reading through the text gives the impression that the readers were new converts. There is a wide variety of basics in the book that support this conjecture.³² Some

³¹ Ibid., 89.

³² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 257.

topics include being born anew (1:3, 1:23), brotherly love (1:22-25), darkness to light (2:9-10), attitude toward rulers (2:13-17), husbands (3:1-6), wives (3:7), fellow Christians (3:8-12), baptism (3:18), and persecution (3:13-17).

Saved by Faith in the Blood of Jesus

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13).

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23);

The last two scriptures show the incredible life-giving and life-saving sacrifice that Jesus made for mankind. His blood covers over our sins because of the cross. Please remember that the point of this book is not to undermine in any way the debt owed to Jesus for his sacrifice, which should always be at the forefront of our faith. The point is to remember and follow what Jesus taught. Romans 6:1-7 identifies Jesus' death with baptism, that at that time people come into contact with Jesus' blood since they are "baptized [into Christ Jesus'] death."

And while they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28)."

This is another place in the New Testament where the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" occurs just like in Acts 2:38. If a person

takes the false view that “*eis*” means “because of,” Jesus would be saying that he does not have to die on the cross. Jesus would be testifying that his blood of the covenant had already been poured out even before his death.

And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life (1 John 5:5-12).

In his letter, John the apostle is trying to counter the Gnostic claim that Jesus did not come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3). God revealed Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews through the water (baptism of John). The writer is referring to the two major events in Jesus' life, his physical baptism in water and his physical death on the cross. Beasley-Murray concurs, noting this description, “John insists that Jesus Christ did not appear as a meteorite from heaven to Jordan, to disappear into heaven again without any true contact with flesh and blood; Jesus Christ was baptized as flesh and blood and died as flesh and blood.”³³ Douglas Jacoby also points out that Jesus' body gushed blood and water when the Roman soldier pierced it (John 19:34).³⁴

³³ Ibid., 236.

³⁴ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 169.



Clothe Yourselves with Christ

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:23-27).

A person becomes a son or daughter of God when faith in Jesus leads them to be baptized. How awesome is the thought of actually becoming the offspring of God Almighty!! The heirs of God will reign with glory in heaven. At baptism, God clothes a person's spiritual body with Christ. Baptism is also a person's marriage with God, where "they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2). In baptism, God the Father places the protective cloak of Jesus around people to cover over all the sin of this life.

Revelation 3:5 says that those who overcome will be dressed in white garments. Being clothed with Christ has an interesting parallel in Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14). In this parable, the king notices a man who came to the banquet without wearing wedding clothes.

"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few *are* chosen (Matthew 22:11-14)."

It is difficult to think about the distressing examples of this when it is applied to the judgment day. As Galatians 3:26-27 shows, when God looks at each human, he notices whether or not people are *covered or dressed with Christ*, not whether they are morally good. On judgment day, God will see an individual's spiritual clothing of Christ and say "You're with me, let's go home!" Galatians 3:26-27 is another scripture in the Bible that shows people how to get "*into Christ Jesus*."

Verses 26-27 also show that faith is not in opposition to baptism. Faith and baptism go hand in hand. If a person really believes, he or she will immediately be baptized. If a person has not known what to believe, how can he really believe? As Beasley-Murray puts it: "The significance of baptism is the objective facts to which it witnesses, the historic event of redemption and the present gift that it makes possible, embraced through faith in that God who acted and yet acts. Through such an alliance of faith and baptism, Christianity is prevented from evaporating into an ethereal subjectivism on the one hand and from hardening into a fossilized objectivism on the other. The two aspects of Apostolic Christianity are preserved in faith-baptism."³⁵

The purpose of the sacrificial death of Christ is stated in Ephesians 5:25-27 as the consecration, cleansing and perfection of the church.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, because we are members of his body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.

³⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 151.

This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25-32).



Ephesus Baptistery with Steps Leading Down to Water

This cleansing takes place in the marriage of Christ to the church, as shown by the phrase “by the washing of water with the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Beasley-Murray indicates that Paul may

have been observing: “the custom: obtaining (sic) among both Jews and Greeks, of a bride taking a ceremonial bath as part of the marriage preparations. If such a ‘washing’ is in mind, there can be little doubt that the readers are expected to recognize its counterpart for the Bride of Christ in baptism; indeed, the twofold addition of ‘the water’ and ‘the word’ makes the baptismal reference in the term ‘washing’ even more clear than the conjectured reference to the bridal bath.”³⁶ An amazing picture is that of a husband baptizing his wife “into Christ Jesus.” This picture can easily bring tears to a reader’s eyes as it is one of the most beautiful sights in creation.

For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

According to Colossians 1:15-18, the body of Christ is the church. People initiate their walk in Christ Jesus through baptism. “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” is the same idea as “baptized into Christ Jesus.” Baptism is the entrance into membership in Jesus’ body, the church. No matter how sincere one is in saying a prayer, responding to an altar call, having faith alone, being voted in by a local church, passing a catechism class, speaking in tongues or being extended the right hand of Christian fellowship, it does not begin one’s membership in Christ’s church. Sometimes people want to be close to Jesus but not be a part of a church. True conversion to Jesus’ teachings involves becoming a member of Jesus’ church.

As Beasley-Murray states so eloquently:

Baptism to Christ is baptism to the Church; it cannot be otherwise, for the Church is the Body of Christ. One gains the impression from Paul’s writings that this thought must have been much more fundamental to him that it is to us...

True though it be that the Church through its representatives baptizes the converts made, and thus that

³⁶ Ibid., 201.

baptism is properly a Church act: the power of baptism does not derive from the Church. Baptism is what it is through the operation of Christ by His Spirit...

On the one hand this indicates that the Spirit is given to all and is not reserved for a privileged elite in the Church; on the other hand it clearly rules out any interpretation of baptism which requires it to be complemented by a later rite for the impartation of the Spirit.

Baptism into the one Body by the one Spirit overcomes the deepest religious and social divisions of mankind: in the Body there is no room for maintaining the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, and slaves and free; in Christ they are 'one man' (Gal. 3:28), and the one Spirit divides his gifts to all. The unity of the Body thus does not consist in uniformity of character and function, on the contrary Paul is about to explain how the very idea of a body presumes the necessity of members with different functions; but these differentiated functions are possible because the Body is a unity, informed by one life and inspired by one Spirit. As with the Supper, baptism obliterates the disunities of man and harmonizes them in the unity of Christ's Body in the one Spirit.³⁷

Into My Life

- What does it mean to wear Christ's name?
- Did I realize that when I was baptized I became a member of Jesus' church?
- Is the representation of different races in my church close to that of the city I live in (John 17:20-23)?

³⁷ Ibid., 279-284.



One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Beasley-Murray shows that it is amazing that Paul lifted up baptism with the rest of these great parts of Christianity. He writes, “The first thought that leaps to the mind when reading Ephesians 4:4-6 from the point of view of our interest in the doctrine of baptism, is the dignity and importance accorded to baptism in virtue of its inclusion in this enumeration of the great ‘unities’ of our Faith.”³⁸ To list baptism with the Lord Jesus Christ, faith of the saints, the church of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father is truly uplifting to the holy flood of baptism.

The New Testament speaks of several different baptisms. This is natural since the word baptize simply means immerse, dip, or wash. These baptisms include John’s baptism (Acts 19:1-5), baptism with fire (Matthew 3), baptism with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1-2), and the Israelites’ baptism into the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10). The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul about 60 A.D. Paul says that around 60 A.D. there is only one baptism. There is a need to determine which baptism is the *one* baptism that Paul was writing about. In 64 A.D., the apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:21 that “baptism now saves you.” Because Peter’s scripture is written later, the *one* baptism, which Paul is talking about, logically has to be Great Commission immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Notice that Paul must be talking about Christian baptism for salvation in Ephesians because Acts 19:1-5 teaches that Christian

³⁸ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 199.

baptism supersedes John's baptism. John's baptism was for repentance. In John's baptism, the baptized did not receive the Holy Spirit, which only came after Christ's glory in his resurrection and ascension to heaven (John 7:39).

Baptism with the Holy Spirit was prophesied by John the Baptist and by Jesus (Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:5, 10:1-11:15). Baptism with the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost day and was preached about by Peter in the first church sermon. Just prior to Peter's sermon, Acts 2:1ff, the twelve apostles were immersed by tongues of fire and by the Holy Spirit, which introduced the church, or kingdom of God, to the earth. (For more detail on these events including baptism of the Holy Spirit and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit see Douglas Jacoby's *The Spirit*.) Baptism with the Holy Spirit was not prayed for and it is not commanded anywhere in the New Testament that every disciple must receive this baptism. Once the *purpose* for baptism with the Holy Spirit was accomplished, that is, the beginning of the church, the need for it could logically end. Miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were normally given at the laying on of the apostles' hands. This is seen in several scriptures such as Acts 19:1-6 and 8:18-19 which reads, "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'"

Often doctrinal debates originate when people forget the *purpose* of God's activities, such as: baptism with the Holy Spirit with the purpose of a visible manifestation revealing God's power to introduce the Lord's Church to the Earth; miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit to "confirm" the word of God being preached when there was no written word of God (Mark 16:15ff, Hebrews 2:1-4); or water baptism for the forgiveness of sins and for receiving the Holy Spirit. Notice that baptism with the Holy Spirit was involuntary. It was not prayed for and not durational, whereas baptism with water is the final command of Jesus for all nations (Matthew 28:18-20) and the first command of the kingdom of God, the Church (Acts 2:38), remaining in effect for eternity, until the end of the age. The one baptism of Ephesians 4:1-4 is therefore shown to be water baptism in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is also the baptism scripture, which most closely resembles the trinitarian formula of the Great Commission.

Notice also that the "one baptism" goes along with the one-body/church concept. The lack of unity on how to become a Christian

explains why there are hundreds of denominations in the world today. This disharmony also shows a disregard for the unity that Jesus and Paul spoke about (John 17:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:10-17). These scriptures teach that God's will is that Christianity should have one faith, one baptism, and one church instead of differing church beliefs. Bruce Shelley, in *Church History in Plain Language*, discusses the origins of the denominational theory of the church. His words (pp. 306-308) merit serious consideration:

Denominationalism, as originally designed, is the opposite of sectarianism. A sect claims the authority of Christ for itself alone. It believes that it is the true body of Christ; all truth belongs to it and to no other religion. So by definition a sect is exclusive.

The word denomination by contrast was an inclusive term. It implied that the Christian group called or denominated by a particular name was but one member of a larger group—the church—to which all denominations belong.

The denominational theory of the church, then, insists that the true church cannot be identified with any single ecclesiastical structure. No denomination claims to represent the whole church of Christ. Each simply constitutes a different form—in worship and organization—of the larger life of the church.

... The real architects of the denominational theory of the church were the seventeenth-century Independents (Congregationalists) who represented the minority voice at the Westminster Assembly (1642-1649). The majority at the Assembly held to Presbyterian principles and expressed these convictions classically in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

The Independents, however, who held to congregational principles, were keenly aware of the dangers of "dividing the godly Protestant party" in England so they looked for some way to express Christian unity even when Christians did not agree.

These dissenting Brethren of Westminster articulated the denominational theory of the church in several fundamental truths:

First, considering man's inability to always see the truth clearly, differences of opinion about the outward form of the church are inevitable.

Second, even though these differences do not involve fundamentals of the faith, they are not matters of indifference. Every Christian is obligated to practice what he believes the Bible teaches.

Third, since no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth, the true Church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical institution.

Finally, the mere fact of separation does not of itself constitute schism. It is possible to be divided at many points and still be united in Christ.

Thus, the denominational theory of the church looked for Christian unity in some inward religious experience—and allowed diversity in the outward expressions of that personal faith.

This tolerant attitude was not born of doctrinal indifference. The Independent had no intention of extending Christian unity to all religious professions. The identity of the "one true church" was restricted to those who shared a common understanding of the core of the Christian faith.

... Few advocates of the denominational view of the church in the seventeenth century envisioned the hundreds of Christian groups included under the umbrella today. They had no intention of reducing the basic beliefs of Christianity to a general feeling of religious sincerity. But they could not control the future. They simply knew that the traditional bigotry and bloodshed in the name of Christ was not the way forward.

In the end, then, the denominational form of the church has marked the recent centuries of Christian history, not because it is ideal, but because it is better than any alternative the years have offered.

And John Engler follows up on this discussion:

Denominationalism may not be perfect. But it allows those having honest differences to treat each other with respect and love, not unwarranted judgment (ref. Romans 14:13). It gives everybody Christian freedom to follow God as they understand Him and His words, with a clear conscience. It allows Christians in a congregation to focus on God and not on items that may divide them from others, while simultaneously treating others with respect and giving them the freedom to do likewise. It allows Christians to respect Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 by recognizing and loving other Christians. The spirit of distinguishing and distancing oneself from other Christians, or claiming to be superior to them, is not found in John 17.

Indeed, many of the differences between congregations allow for the body of Christ to meet needs in various ways, just as individual members of a local congregation also allow for those members to meet the needs of that local congregation (ref. 1 Corinthians 12:12ff). However, this also requires that individual congregations make efforts to treat each other in ways that honor Christ.



‘Into What Then Were You Baptized?’

And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they *said* to him, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” And they said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:1-5).

The clear distinction between John’s baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and that of Great Commission baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit is shown in this scripture. Notice the urgency and sincerity of Paul for the disciples to be baptized in the name of Jesus. By his question, “into what then were you baptized?” Paul indicates an immense difference between John’s baptism and Jesus’ baptism.

This scripture combined with the preceding section about Apollos (Acts 18:24-28) indicates that Apollos was teaching, like John the Baptist, that people must be baptized for repentance. Once Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more adequately,” Apollos changed and started teaching Great Commission baptism in the name of Jesus to receive the Holy Spirit. Since Apollos was teaching in Ephesus and the twelve disciples that Paul met were from Ephesus, they may have been taught incorrectly (really, out-datedly) by Apollos. Notice their humility and lack of defensiveness in submitting to their rebaptism, their one and only Great Commission baptism. The twelve Ephesian disciples set a great precedent for those who have experienced incomplete biblical

teaching in the past to humbly submit themselves to the word of God and a “new teaching” (Acts 17:19).

Notice also what Paul says to the disciples when he finds out they have not heard of the Holy Spirit. He asks them directly what baptism they received. Paul does this because he knows and teaches that the Holy Spirit is given from God in Great Commission baptism. However, one should be careful to not place too much emphasis on his or her baptism. God’s grace covers our lack of understanding complete theological teaching on this subject. A person should not think that he should get re-baptized every time they learn a new insight about baptism. Some background information can be found in Acts 18:24-28 although there is no proof that Apollos was “rebaptized.”³⁹

The seal of the Holy Spirit is another important theme of the New Testament. Consider the following scriptures.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

The seal shows the authority that a person is under when baptized. W. Heitmüller (who wrote a major work on baptism) believed that the sealed object was the property of another.⁴⁰ Sealed Christians would therefore be the property of Jesus Christ (the

³⁹ It is an interesting but inconclusive study to consider whether or not Apollos, the twelve apostles, or those baptized before Pentecost by John’s or Jesus’ disciples were “rebaptized” and when they received the indwelling Holy Spirit. Douglas Jacoby sets up some of the possible scenarios in his book, *The Spirit*.

⁴⁰ W. Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu* (Göttingen, Germany: herausg von W. Bousset und H. Gunkel, 1903), 334.

primitive church would have understood this well). The seal or trademark would become effective when a person was baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Baptism stamps the new convert as Jesus’ property. The seal of the Spirit is seen as an inward sign of possession which none but God can see. This can be contrasted with the outward sign of the Jewish covenant—the seal of Abraham on the flesh in circumcision. The inward mark is an identification similar to being clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

There are a couple of great biblical stories in regard to being marked. The characteristic of having the mark of Christ is primarily for the eschatological view (judgment day). Consider the vision of Ezekiel.

Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, “Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. And the LORD said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.” But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. “Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who *were* before the temple. And He said to them, “Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” Thus they went out and struck down *the people* in the city. Then it came about as they were striking and I *alone* was left, that I fell on my face and cried out saying, “Alas, Lord GOD! Art Thou destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Thy wrath on Jerusalem?” Then He said to me, “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is

very, very great, and the land is filled with blood, and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!' "But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare, but I shall bring their conduct upon their heads." Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as Thou hast commanded me (Ezekiel 9:1-11)."

Still more to the point is Revelation 7, which describes how the angels are told not to harm the earth until the servants of God receive the seal. Gordon Ferguson, in his book *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, states, "Satan's servants were likewise sealed ('marked') by God (Revelation 13:16-17, 14:9, 16:2, etc.)."⁴¹ These are great examples showing the use of the sealing by the Holy Spirit which a person receives when he or she becomes a Christian. Then the sealed servants of God attain to his Kingdom.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen." And one of the elders

⁴¹ Gordon Ferguson, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1996), 75.

answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?” And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:1-3, 9-17).”

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave *us* the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

The *seal* of the Holy Spirit can be compared to the *anointing* of the Holy Spirit. God typically gives the anointed person a mission. For instance, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Acts 10:37-38). The anointing of Jesus occurred when the heavens opened, God the Father spoke, and the Holy Spirit landed on Jesus in the form of a dove (Mark 1:9-13). Jesus went immediately on a mission to the desert to be tempted by Satan for forty days and then Christ began his formal ministry. In the same way, after the flood of Noah, the dove returned, indicating that it was safe to go out into the world that had been destroyed. Just as God shut or *sealed* Noah in the ark (Genesis 7:15), God *seals* us with the Holy Spirit. Notice that just as with Noah and the ark, the Lord had to seal it himself and in the same way, we cannot save ourselves by our own effort or ingenuity. Thus we see how baptism relates to the *seal* or *anointing* of the Holy Spirit.

Observations on Baptism Scriptures

This book is about the importance of Great Commission baptism. The point is never to diminish the cross or sacrifice of Jesus Christ, faith in God, or repentance from sins, but rather to show that the Scriptures include baptism as a significant part of the salvation process. God's word shows how all the scriptures work together, with baptism coming as the conclusion of a person's conversion to Jesus. The Bible clearly teaches and preaches baptism as being the beginning or marriage ceremony in our relationship with God.

Scripture also shows that baptism gives the essential spiritual gifts of the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note that non-religious people who are taught about baptism and true Bible doctrine usually have no problem accepting what the Bible says about it. It is only people like myself who have been taught erroneously in the past who have a problem with what the Bible teaches about baptism.

It is important to remember that most of the New Testament books were letters written to churches and individual Christians, not evangelistic epistles to non-Christians. The New Testament scholar should therefore not be surprised to find less discussion and emphasis on the initial conversion topic of baptism. On the other hand, baptism is very noticeable when studying the church-history-oriented book of Acts which records the spread of Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world. The would-be disciple of Christ also needs to be careful that conversion is not made into a ritual. This process should never be reduced to simply the "steps of conversion" as in the *Four Spiritual Laws* of Campus Crusade or even the Five Steps to Salvation of the church of Christ: 1) Hear 2) Believe 3) Repent 4) Confess and 5) Be Baptized. There are fundamental truths in both, but a person should not just memorize and perform a formula. Jesus Christ changes our lives forever and he should properly be our focus. But people must live out changed lives and make a decision to start one's life over when being *born again*.

When a person reads the Bible about any topic, he or she needs to study the subject thoroughly. They must read and understand the whole text, especially if it involves salvation. Any serious disciple of Jesus takes the “complete New Covenant” view, putting all the truths together to make both common and logical sense. The danger of taking a couple verses out of context can be readily seen from “he went away and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:3) and Jesus saying “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37). This type of faulty exegesis results in a justification for suicide. People should read the whole Bible with as little prejudice or bias as possible. Then it may be seen from the New Testament what God expects from disciples of Jesus.

This heart of obeying Christ is what true disciples of Jesus are all about. Followers of Jesus should search through the Bible to find what God wants of his one church, his body, if men and women are to continue to restore biblical church aspects in this century to the commitment, love, prayer, devotion, fellowship, and the Apostolic doctrine of the first century church (Acts 2:42-47). This restoration spirit makes common and biblical sense!

Jesus said that if a blind man leads a blind man, both would fall into a pit. Subjective testimony from a priest, minister, friend or family member is not a criterion for truth. Even though people will always cherish the memory of deceased loved ones and spiritual guides that helped them grow, they must trust God’s word. But today, since people should know better, each person needs to take personal responsibility and find out for themselves, from the Bible, what becoming a Christian or “in Christ Jesus” really means and how God says to be saved. People will be judged by the Bible—therefore they should know it (John 12:46-48)!

βαπτίζω

baptizo = dip, plunge, immerse, drown

Translation = immerse

Transliteration = baptidzo

Notice that in the original language baptize meant to *immerse* or *plunge* or *dip*. Baptize was used in examples of a ship sinking completely or a garment being dyed a new color. Baptize never meant sprinkling or pouring. The New Testament Greek word for baptism is “baptizo.” To Jesus, the apostles, and the New Testament church, baptism meant to immerse, plunge, or dunk. It also meant that a

person was changing his or her life to live for God.

The preceding scriptures have shown that the object people are commanded today to be immersed in is water, not the Holy Spirit, fire, or belief. Although other baptisms were used in the New Testament, it has been shown that the Great Commission baptism is the “one baptism” that Ephesians 4:1-5 speaks about.

Where did the English word, baptism, come from? In other words, why is the translation *baptism* and not *immersion*? The answer is seen in the transliteration of Greek to English. Occasionally, a word in the Greek or Hebrew Bible does not have a direct translation. In that case, a word may be created in the English language that never existed previously. Many of the early Protestant Reformation Bibles, including the King James Version (1605-1611 A.D.), were translated from Jerome’s Latin Vulgate. See the appendix on Refuting False Conversion Doctrines for more detail.

Notice also that even if the direct translation were “to sprinkle,” substituting that word for “to baptize” would make no sense in the Bible passages. A person should consider the difference between *sprinkling water on a person* and *sprinkling the body of a person*. Acts 2:38 would result in, “Repent, and let each of you be sprinkled.” The only way a person could be sprinkled is to have their body cremated and then have someone else sprinkle their physical body’s ashes. This absurd illustration is not what Jesus or the apostles had in mind!! In fact, John went where there was much water (John 3:23).

The practice of transliterating “baptizo” continued to grow as more denominations grew out of the Catholic church in the Protestant Reformation. Those churches that sprinkled infants persecuted those that immersed adults. The Anabaptists were some of the first people to immerse adults during the Protestant Reformation time period. The Anabaptists provoked the authorities so much that the state authorities in Switzerland decided to murder anyone who was immersed as an adult. The state church killed the “heretics” by drowning them. The thinking was that if it was water that the Anabaptists wanted, water they would get. The stiff-necked reaction to changing back to actual Bible doctrine is unfortunately not very different today as many excuses are made to not accept the Word of God. As Apollos had a heart to change, perhaps the spirit of God is challenging many believers to learn and teach the word of God in a more adequate manner.



Hot Tub Baptism

Yet many believers in Christ and entire church denominations today say that the mode of the “sacrament” does not matter. Baptism is not just a matter of semantics. Baptism is a part of the salvation process. If people place their eternal life and others’ destiny on Jesus’ words, they should want to know the truth. A truth seeker should want to know the actual meaning, not the evolution of a word for the past two thousand years. Many denominations admit that sprinkling or pouring is not what baptism meant during the New Testament church, so why do they still persist in it today? Even one of the greatest founders of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, stated: “First, baptism is a Greek word. In Latin it can be translated immersion, as when something is plunged into water that it may be completely covered with water.”⁴² Does not James 4:17 say that the good they know they should do, but don’t do, is sin? But Luther dealt with that scripture as he did the whole book of James: He wanted to disassociate it from the rest of his Bible because it was too *works focused*. John Calvin (another Reformation movement leader) maintained the same refusal to accept what the Bible states about

⁴² L.G. Tomlinson, *Churches of Today in the Light of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), 39.

baptism: “It is of no consequence at all whether the person baptized is totally immersed, or whether he is merely sprinkled by an affusion of water. This should be a matter of choice to the churches in different regions, although the word *baptize signifies to immerse*, and the rite of immersion was practiced by the ancient church.”⁴³

Some religious people overreact to the Catholic Church by saying that baptism should be done, but that it is only a symbol of what has already happened or that it is only a public display of faith and thus should just be considered a ritual. Even though it has been shown that baptism is a beautiful symbol of the gospel itself (Romans 6:1-5), nowhere in the Bible does any writer consider baptism simply ceremonial. Circumcision, the way a man started his Jewish existence, surely was not ceremonial to the individual. The writers are sincere when they talk about the importance of baptism and they should be believed. None of the New Testament writers considered baptism as purely symbolic.

Some religious people try to claim that the Greek word in Acts 2:38 means to be baptized “because” of the forgiveness of a person’s sins rather than “for” the forgiveness of a person’s sins. This false doctrine teaches a believer’s baptism is for the person that has already been saved. Another appendix shows the true meaning of the Greek in Acts 2:38 from many denominational scholars’ translations.

In another appendix is a table showing the different steps for biblical salvation in the book of Acts. Notice that when a person is baptized in the Bible, the verb is always in passive voice, indicating that God is acting on the person being baptized. This also shows that the person is just accepting God’s grace. Even more convincing is the fact that there is not one single example in the Bible where a person just “prayed Jesus into his heart” via a so-called “sinner’s prayer,” “accepting Jesus,” or by “receiving Christ.” Obviously faith is the first step and critically important, but it’s not the only step on the way to being “in Christ Jesus.”

It should never be forgotten that if Jesus had not died on the cross for sins, no one could get to heaven. Jesus has thus given a narrow road for people to follow (Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23), requiring them to put their faith in him, to repent of their sins, and to be baptized as the way that God has determined a person may get into a right, personal relationship with him. The Jews taught that men could

⁴³ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 310.

get to heaven by one's good works and the sacrifice system. God gave help through his Son. So remember that the key is not being good enough to get to heaven, but rather letting a person's belief lead them to be "in Christ Jesus," who is the only path to eternal life.

The false doctrine of just "accepting Christ" came from the Protestant Reformation denominations. The denominations led by Martin Luther and other Protestants overcompensated for the Catholic church, which was based on a works theology (overcompensating similar to falling asleep driving a car, hitting the gravel on the right and then yanking the wheel back to the left and going into the other ditch). Remember also that baptism pales in comparison to repentance of sins in the convert's life. James 2:14-24 says that faith works and that, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." Our faith is shown through deeds. Christianity is not a works religion but rather the Bible says people will live by faith and are "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). If individuals are *in Christ Jesus*, they have nothing to worry about. The Bible teaches that people *get* to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins, not that people have *got* to be baptized.

The doctrine of baptism for the forgiveness of sins is very clear in the Bible. When confronted with biblical truth that contradicts the teachings that they have held so close to for so much of their lives, will a person submit to the will of God's word or will they remain mired in their stubborn, selfish sin? Many religious people have seen dramatic changes for the Lord and the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and that's wonderful! But like the learned man Apollos (Acts 18:24-26) who had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, people need to be willing to accept help and learn the scriptural way of God more adequately. Look at what Apollos did (Acts 18:24-26) and what the twelve disciples in Ephesus did (Acts 19:1-5). Do we have the same heart as Apollos to simply accept the word of God and to change our doctrine overnight?

What if a person was watching a court having a trial, and there was an endless procession of three thousand witnesses. The court's purpose was to decide how the three thousand people became Christians on the day of Pentecost. The first one came forward and said that he called on the name of the Lord Jesus, repented of his sins, believed in his heart that Peter's message was from God, and was immersed for the forgiveness of his sins and the gift of God's Holy Spirit. The next new Christian came forward and said the same exact thing. Repeating the same pattern, the third person, the thirtieth

person, the three hundredth person, and the three thousandth person walked to the witness stand and gave the exact same testimony. By the thirtieth person, the jury would be asleep with boredom because of the overwhelming number and consistency of the witnesses. After the three thousandth person gives his testimony, the leaders of the movement and the Son of God come forward. They admit this is their teaching “for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.” At that point, it is beyond all doubt how to become a Christian. In the end, Jesus’ words are going to judge people (John 12:46-48). Will a person believe his or her priest, minister, family, friends, or the word of God?

Just as marriage is the start of a new relationship with a spouse, baptism is the start of a new relationship with God. The similarities between physical marriage and one’s spiritual wedding ceremony to God are striking. This will help an individual understand baptism and conversion much better. Paul says that he promised the church to one husband, that is Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-6). F. Lagard Smith gives some great illustrations about marriage and baptism in his book *Baptism: The Believer’s Wedding Ceremony*.⁴⁴ Ezekiel 23:40 talks about the Jewish custom where the bride cleans herself in an act of ceremonial cleansing before donning her wedding dress.

What if a person was married but did not have a physical relationship? What if a person was married but did not communicate with their spouse? Dating is like studying the Bible or hearing the Word. Engagement is making the decision to get married to God. A person’s spiritual wedding is his baptism. Living in sin would be a false relationship with God without the divine ordinances of the wedding ceremony. A pre-arranged marriage would be infant baptism. Vows of confession as in Acts 22:16, Hebrews 10:23 and 1 Peter 3:18-21 are exchanged in the wedding ceremony. Acts 2:38 talks about gifts that are received at the wedding, forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke 15:21-24 talks about celebrating at the wedding as the Ethiopian eunuch did in Acts 8. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 shows the rings of the wedding ceremony, the seal of ownership in the Holy Spirit. A new name is received, the name of Christ, at the spiritual wedding. Hebrews 9:13-14 and Romans 6 detail the joining of unequals, Christ and the church. Divorce from a person’s relationship with God is falling away from him. Remember

⁴⁴ F. LaGard Smith, *Baptism: The Believer’s Wedding Ceremony* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1993), 1-217.

also the parable of the Wedding Banquet that was discussed earlier in connection with Galatians 3:24-27, and the person with no wedding clothes who is thrown out by the master (Matthew 22:1-15).

My purpose is to call people back to the Bible and to show how to become a Christian from the word of God alone. Hebrews 2:3 states: "...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" The question appears to come down to: "Who are people going to follow, men or God?" Contradictions between the traditions of men and the word of God are the same things Jesus condemned the Pharisees for (Matthew 15:1-9). When it comes to biblical topics, conversion is of utmost importance. Therefore, people must make sure that in regard to conversion, they are solid in the Bible and not just going along with the traditions of their church, family or leaders. If a person will keep their focus on God, who is the author of one's conversion, regeneration and rebirth, his or her theology must stay pure in regard to conversion. Peter emphasized it best when he said: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

I have gained these convictions because after 21 years of church services and Bible camps I realized that I was not living for Jesus because I did not even know the word of God. My friend, "Shu," showed me that I had nowhere to turn except to Jesus and the Bible. I had been baptized at the ripe old age of ten on Easter Sunday with seven other kids in my parents' church. I was immersed, but I had no clue what Jesus as the Lord of my life meant or how Christ could change my life. I was emotional, crying for a full day, even though I did not know why. I even had a class for three or four weeks before my baptism to explain its importance. Yet, I went right back to my old life, lusting constantly for sports, good grades, and a girlfriend; my life was not any different as I was not truly born again. At the age of 21, Shu asked me to study the Bible with him. He showed me the love of Jesus, taught me the word of God and helped me work through and overcome my stubbornness and pride. I put my trust in God, accepted his word, and obeyed it. I started my life over, was "born again...born of water and the Spirit" on July 27, 1986. I made the decision to trust in Christ' blood and follow Jesus. My friends, Harold and Carol Shumaker, and I drove ten miles from Carthage, Illinois through a Midwest lightning and thunderstorm at 10:30 PM to the Burnside Christian Church. Shu then *baptized me into Christ*. I

was a new person, forgiven by God thanks to Jesus' blood, and starting over. God changed my life through the help of Christ, the Bible, and two disciples who helped me begin again.

Won't you do the same? Perhaps you have a gnawing feeling deep down that you've never really become a Christian the way the Bible instructs. Or perhaps you are born of water and the Spirit but you haven't had the conviction to go out and fulfill the Great Commission by teaching your friends the truth about Jesus in the way you should. I pray that you will take this message personally. God will bless your decision as he has mine and all the other saints throughout history. And drop me a line so that we can celebrate together!

Appendix A

A Study of Conversion in the Book of Acts

Scripture	Faith	Repentance	Baptism	Forgiveness	Holy Spirit	Church
Acts 2:14-47	Implied vv. 37,41	Stated v. 38	Stated v. 38	Stated v. 38	Stated v. 38	Implied vv. 8-47
Acts 8:9-13	Stated vv. 12,13		Stated vv. 12,13			Implied vv. 8-13
Acts 8:26-39	Implied v. 36		Stated v. 38	Implied v. 39	Implied v. 39	
Acts 9:1-19	Implied vv. 5,17	Implied v. 9	Stated v. 18		Stated v. 17	Implied vv. 17-18
Acts 10:1-11:18	Implied 10:1-8	Stated 11:18	Stated 10:48			Implied 1:17-18
Acts 22:5-16	Implied vv. 8,14-15		Stated v. 16	Stated v. 16		
Acts 16:13-15	Stated vv. 14, 15		Stated v. 15			Implied v.15
Acts 16:25-34	Stated vv. 31,34		Stated v. 33	Stated v. 31		Implied vv. 31-33
Additional References	John 3:16 Heb. 11:16	Matt. 18:1-3 Luke 13:3,5 Acts 17:30	Mark 16:15-16 John 3:3,5 Gal. 3:26 Col. 2:12 1 Peter 3:21	Isaiah 59:1-2 Romans 6:23 Ephesians 1:7	Rom. 8:9-11 Eph. 1:13-14 Gal. 5:22-23	1 Cor. 12:12-13 Matt. 28:18-20 Mark 16:15-16 John 3:1-7

Into My Life

* For each conversion, ask these questions:

1. What was the person taught?
2. What was the person's response to the message?
3. How long did it take the person to make a decision?
4. What was the person's response after his or her baptism?

* Draw a timeline for the following events in your life:

Birth Today
 ←—————→

Came to faith	Forgiven of sins
Converted	Immersed
Believed	Born again
Received Christ	Repented/Lordship
Prayed Jesus into heart	Joined church
Infant baptized	Holy Spirit baptized
Received Spirit	Saved

* Does my life match what the Bible teaches in the graph on the previous page?

Appendix B

Translations of the Greek Word “eis” in Acts 2:38

Denomination	Translation	Title	Author
Baptist	unto, for, in order to	Shepherd's Handbook	Axtell
Baptist	unto, to	Shepherd's Handbook	Dill
Baptist	in order to	Shepherd's Handbook	Harkness
Baptist	in order to	Baptist Quarterly, 1878	Willmar
Baptist	unto, in order to receive	Shepherd's Handbook	Harper
Baptist	Unto	Commentary on John	Hovey
Church of England	for the putting away	Commentary on Acts	Abbott
Congregational	purpose	Shepherd's Handbook	Goodwin
Congregational	into, toward	Greek-English Lexicon	Thayer
Lutheran	denotes object	Commentary on Acts	Meyer
Methodist	with a view to	McLintock & Strong Ency.	McLintock
Methodist	unto	Commentary on Acts	Rice
Methodist	in order to	Shepherd's Handbook	Strong
Methodist	unto, to the end	Shepherd's Handbook	Summers
Methodist	for, unto	Commentary on Bible	Benson
Methodist	is always prospective	Wilkes-Ditzler Debate	Ditzler
Methodist	the object to be obtained	Shepherd's Handbook	Harmon
NIV Translation	so that	1973 NIV initial translation	Committee
Presbyterian	end toward which	Shepherd's Handbook	Butcher
Presbyterian	for, to, or toward	Commentary on Acts	Alexander
Presbyterian	unto, to this end	Commentary on Acts	Jacobus
Presbyterian	might receive	Shepherd's Handbook	Schaff
Presbyterian	aim, purpose	Shepherd's Handbook	Godet

Appendix C

The Greek Text of Matthew 28:18-20

Introduction⁴⁵

There have been questions concerning the meaning of Matthew 28:18-20 and its impact upon the qualifications of candidates for baptism. This paper will briefly discuss the critical features of the text in question and draw conclusions in accordance with these facts.

The Text

Let us consider the translation of this passage in the New International Version (NIV) and the New American Standard Version (NASV), along with the Greek text from the International Bible Society (IBS).

IBS

[18] καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πάντα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς. [19] πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, [20] διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετείλαμην ὑμῖν καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάντα τὰ ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

NIV

[18] Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And

⁴⁵ © By John Engler Highlands Ranch, CO June 1998

surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

NAS

[18] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Transliterated IBS Text (v. 19a only)

[19] poreuthentes ouv mathēteusate panta ta ethnē, baptizontes autous eis to onoma...

The Translation of the Passage

Observations about this passage and translation of v. 19:

- 1- The Greek verb (imperative mode) “mathēteusate” is translated “make disciples” in the English versions.
- 2- In English the word “disciple” is a noun only; it has no defined verb meanings⁴⁶ (in fact, Greek-English dictionaries define “mathēteuō” as “make a disciple of, teach”⁴⁷). This limitation of the English language is central to the difficulty of understanding this passage correctly, as it forces the translator concerned about proper English to translate a Greek verb into an English verb-noun combination. Yet, it is helpful to translate the Greek “mathēteusate” as a verb in English, “disciple.”

⁴⁶ Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam & Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1977, p. 325.

⁴⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd edition revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer’s fifth edition (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 485.

- 3- A correct English translation of the text is “make disciples of all nations.” “Make disciples” is a verb, “nations” is a noun. There are no “disciples” (noun) in the sentence.⁴⁸
- 4- “Baptizing” and “teaching to obey” are participles identified as steps in the “discipling” of the nations. This statement is a summary of Jesus’ ministry to the apostles and is not intended to be a comprehensive statement concerning conversion or discipling. “The force of the command is to make Jesus’ disciples responsible for making disciples of others, a task characterized by baptism and instruction.”⁴⁹
- 5- Those who are being “baptized” and “taught to obey” are thus “discipled” (verb). “The response of discipleship is baptism and instruction.”⁵⁰

Pre-Requisites for Baptism

This passage does not explicitly discuss pre-requisites for one to be baptized. Baptism and teaching to obey are expressed as the major aspects of the "discipling" of the nations.

A critical question is, "Do you have to be a 'disciple' to be baptized?" Before answering such a question, we need to define some terminology and concepts more precisely.

Anyone seeking to be baptized and to be taught to obey all that Jesus has commanded has been "discipled" (instructed) to seek these things. This is exactly what this text has in mind.

Some have suggested that certain passages "define what a disciple" is-- these might include Luke 14:25-33, John 13:34, John 15:8, and others. Working from this, some think that these passages mean one must "deny himself", "love one another," "bear fruit that will last" and the like prior to baptism.

⁴⁸ The “them” (as in “baptizing them” etc.) is the Greek pronoun “autous,” which is masculine. Since “ta ethne” (the nations) is neuter, we understand this text to mean that it is not the “nations” *per se* that are to be baptized, but rather the *individuals* of the nations are the ones to be baptized.

⁴⁹ D.A. Carson “Matthew,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, Volume 8, p. 597.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

However, such an understanding is at odds with examples of New Testament conversion seen in the book of Acts, the balance of the New Testament (where such concepts are never presented as prerequisites for baptism), and man's sinful nature as well. Further, taking such concepts from the Messianic ministry of Jesus and bringing them into church age conversion requires ripping them out of their contexts. This isn't to say love, fruit-bearing or other "marks" of a disciple aren't good things, but it is incorrect to suggest that some arbitrary level of performance in these areas is somehow a prerequisite for baptism based upon Matthew 28:19. Sinners come to Christ upon hearing the gospel possessing only their need for salvation and their faith in Christ.

Similarly, some have taken the text from Luke 14:25 and taught that one must somehow "count the cost" before baptism. Again, this is taking the passage in Luke out of context-- Jesus was talking about people following him during his earthly ministry, not responding to the gospel in the church age. His point was that people expected an earthly kingdom and they needed to know that the cross rather than the throne of Israel was in Jesus' immediate future. To the question at hand, there are no examples of anyone "counting the cost" prior to baptism in the church age. This is not to say one should not be sober minded about the implications of faith in Christ. But such concerns can obscure the gospel and make those implications greater than God and his working in our lives.

Conclusions

The intent of this article has been to first correctly understand v. 19, and then to briefly consider its impact upon the entire conversion process.

Because of the limitations of the English language, translations of this passage can lead to misleading meanings. However, for the purposes of understanding this passage, a verb sense to the English "disciple" could be implemented. This would facilitate a more straightforward translation of the passage, "Disciple the nations."

The object of making disciples, baptizing and teaching to obey is "the nations." The individual members of "the nations" are the ones to be made disciples of, baptized and taught to obey everything Jesus commanded.

Concerning the broader questions of conversion and discipleship, the teachings of other biblical passages have been briefly considered and harmonized with the text in question. Examining the entire conversion process is clearly a separate task that should be undertaken as a separate study.

❧ Appendix D ❧

False Conversion Doctrines

1. “Pray Jesus into Your Heart,” “Accept the Lord,” “Receive Christ,” “Altar Calls”

The phrase “pray Jesus into your heart” is not in the Bible. This teaching began 1,800 years after Jesus Christ died for our sins during the revivals of the “Second Great Awakening” in rural America. Dr. Bruce L. Shelley⁵¹ in his book *Church History in Plain Language*⁵² describes the inflammatory James McGready, the first of many flame-throwing preachers. People would come out from the villages and cities to hear traveling revival preachers in large “camp meetings” or “tent meetings.” Many times the preaching would get very emotional with moving descriptions of a tantalizing heaven and painful hell. The preacher would invite the emotionally moved crowd to respond by coming forward for an “altar call,” prayers, and to “accept Jesus as your personal savior.” Today, the “camp meeting” has moved indoors and into the city, utilizing auditoriums for all sorts of crusades, sports stadiums, and the airwaves for TV and radio evangelists (such as the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and the Bible Answer Man supported by the Christian Research Institute (CRI)).

Sometimes sincere religious people quote the Bible as the reason to “receive Christ through faith alone,” saying that there are more scriptures on faith than there are on baptism. In this way, they pit scripture against itself. Some people believe the scriptures that they have obeyed in the past, and disbelieve the scriptures they have not obeyed. The false doctrine of “praying Jesus into one’s heart” has been propagated through many denominational churches and through the evangelical Campus Crusade, Billy Graham, PromiseKeepers, and

⁵¹ Bruce L. Shelley is Senior Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Denver Theological Seminary. Dr. Shelley holds the M.Div. degree from Fuller Theological Seminary and the Ph.D. from the University of Iowa.

⁵² Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 386-387.

other campus groups. While these groups have tremendous heart that promote Christ around the world, there are a few things that they should mature in, just like for Apollos when Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more adequately.” Campus Crusade has printed over one billion *Four Spiritual Laws*⁵³ pamphlets and now distributes other similar pamphlets such as *Would You Like to Belong to God’s Family?*⁵⁴ The pamphlets teach a different response to the gospel of Christ than what the Bible teaches by telling people that they can have their sins forgiven simply by “praying Jesus into your heart.”⁵⁵

Unfortunately, note that there is not one example of an “altar call” or “pray Jesus into your heart” in the New Testament. Many Protestants and Evangelicals, including entire church denominations, unwittingly stake their spiritual marriage on this false doctrine. Religious people may try to use Revelation 3:20 which talks about Jesus knocking on the door of a person’s heart. However, a person must examine each scripture in context. As is often said, “a *proof-text* out of *context* is a *pre-text*.” This scripture does not tell a person how to become a Christian. Revelation 3:20 is written *to Christians* who have become lukewarm in their hearts. It is addressed to Christians who have already responded to Christ in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism many years earlier. Campus Crusade’s *Four Spiritual Laws* and the Bible Answer Man/Christian Research Institute’s *Does your relationship with God make sure you will go to heaven when you die?* pamphlets both quote this scripture out of context just before telling people to pray the “sinner’s prayer.”⁵⁶ ⁵⁷ It is a spiritual and doctrinal shame that neither pamphlet says one word about baptism.

In his book *How to be Born Again*, Billy Graham also takes Revelation 3:20 out of context.⁵⁸ Not only does he use scriptures out

⁵³ Bill Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ), 16.

⁵⁴ Bill Bright, *Would You Like to Belong to God’s Family?* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publications), 1-20.

⁵⁵ Bill Bright, *Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws?* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ), 10-11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁷ Hendrik “Hank” Hanegraaff, *Does Your Relationship with God Make Sure You Will Go to Heaven when You Die?* (San Juan Capistrano, CA: Memory Dynamics, Inc.), 14-16.

⁵⁸ Billy Graham, *The Collected Works of Billy Graham* (New York, NY: Inspiration Press), 214.

of context to support his position, he also avoids Jesus' explanation about *how* to be born again in John 3:1-7. Graham quotes verses 3, 4, 7, and 16 about belief and changing one's life (Graham's version is "trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior") but he completely ignores Jesus going out baptizing at the end of the chapter and leaves out the water in verse 5 where Jesus states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Graham makes a big point that one must be *born again* but ignores that a person must be *born of water*. He also continually quotes faith and repentance scriptures while ignoring other salvation scriptures and does not even use Acts 2:37-42 (the first day of Jesus' church where at least 3,000 people were saved). This gives a biblically educated person the impression that Graham does not want to deal with scriptures that may change people's mind from what he and most other denominations teach about salvation. From the numerous examples of people in his book at his crusades, one almost gets the impression that Graham wants to use people's experiences of "receiving Christ" as the standard to be born again rather than using the word of God as the standard to be born again. He accuses many churches of not preaching the "whole gospel" and that people "hear a gospel which is incomplete, and consequently not good news at all."⁵⁹ It is a real shame that the same accusation of an *incomplete gospel* response could be stated of Billy Graham's teaching in regard to the bible's teaching on conversion.

In interpreting the Scriptures, one must consider not only the immediate context of the particular book of the Bible but also the historical context. The immediate context takes into view the sentences or paragraph preceding and following the verse in question. The historical context recognizes prior historical events beyond the scope of the immediate writing of the letter. Consider the following:

* The gospels do not discuss every aspect of contemporary Judaism and the Law of Moses. The Old Testament books focus on these matters.

* Acts doesn't focus on the fine points of discipleship to Jesus, especially since the Christ was no longer present in bodily form. Instead, it shows how the church grew and spread throughout various parts of the world as the gospel touched the lives of numerous individuals and groups. Luke recognizes that the reader is already

⁵⁹ Ibid, 258.

somewhat familiar with “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1) from the gospels, at least Luke’s gospel.

* The epistles presuppose the historical establishment of the churches that are being addressed. The historical background for most of the epistles is seen in Acts.

This consideration of historical context is especially important in discussing how people became Christians in the first century. The epistles are addressed to people who are already Christians, presupposing the establishment of the churches after the pattern seen in Acts. The epistles only discuss conversion with a view towards understanding some doctrinal or ethical ramification of it. For instance, 1 Corinthians doesn’t discuss how the Corinthians became Christians—Acts 17 covers that event. 1 Corinthians discusses their conversion to Christianity, but only for the purpose of explaining further points of significance.

For instance, sometimes a person will quote a scripture from a Pauline epistle or the book of John in order to justify their salvation. The person will quote it without being able to justify their way of being saved by comparing it to events throughout the church history book, the Acts of the Apostles, which spans the time period between about 28A.D. to 65A.D. Every book in the New Testament after the book of Acts is like a snapshot photograph or glimpse of a particular church, person or group of Christians and their needs at one point in time. To get the proper context for salvation in the New Testament, it is essential that one should focus on understanding faith principles from the gospels of Jesus and the spread of the church to the Mediterranean world from the book of Acts. Then a person can properly interpret the epistles, which are based on the books in the Old Testament, the gospels and the church history book of Acts. This is a popular way many people go the wrong direction in their understanding of conversion.

Some people also say that this false doctrine is based on Romans 10:9. You must look at this scripture in its context as well. Paul is addressing the problem of the Israelite people. He writes the whole chapter of Romans 10 about the Jews. What is the Israelites’ problem? The Jews’ problem was that they did not believe that Jesus was the resurrected Messiah, the Son of God.

The Jews did not care about how to become a Christian because they did not believe in Jesus. This argument must be taken in context as one should read on to Romans 10:13. When did the people call on the name of the Lord? People normally confessed that Jesus was the

Son of God at the time of their conversion and baptism. Paul called on the name of Jesus and made the good confession of 1 Timothy 6:12 and Hebrews 10:23 in Acts 22:14-16. Paul called on the name of the Lord Jesus at his baptism. Why would Paul the apostle travel all over the Mediterranean world teaching people differently from the way he was converted? Paul had already talked about other parts of conversion in the book of Romans. He talked about repentance in Romans 1-2 and about baptism in Romans 6:1-5.

Douglas Jacoby conveys the following when he states in *Life to the Full*:

“Rebirth” (1:23): We were not reborn through perishable seed (human sperm), but through the seed, the word of God (Luke 8:11), which is imperishable. This happens at baptism. There is no other way to be reborn. The modern doctrine of “pray Jesus into your heart” originated in the last century in the United States; there is not a shred of evidence in the Bible to support it! Don’t be sentimental... We need to interpret Scripture carefully, especially when it concerns crucial issues like how to be saved.

Compare these three passages: 1 Peter 1:3, 1:23, and 3:21. What do you see? Rebirth through the resurrection, rebirth through [obeying] the word of God, and salvation by baptism through the resurrection. The three passages are complementary, not contradictory. There is only one way to be saved: the way the Bible says!

Since the Word preached to us is eternal, we are born again and receive eternal life in the waters of baptism (John 3:5; Titus 3:5).⁶⁰

One other scripture that is widely used out of context is John 5:24. The first problem with using this scripture to promote “praying Jesus into your heart” is that the gospels are written before the ushering in of the New Covenant of Jesus’ blood in his death. Any scripture in the gospels showing salvation should agree with the teaching after the New Covenant was instituted, i.e. during the church age. The second problem with using this scripture to promote

⁶⁰ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 71-72.

“praying Jesus into your heart” is that it contradicts Jesus’ own words two chapters earlier in John 3:5. The third problem is that it contradicts the apostles’ teaching that membership in the church was based upon belief, repentance, and baptism in Acts 2:36-42 and throughout the rest of the book of Acts, the history document of the New Testament church. The fourth problem is that even though the scripture is not vague, they read something into it and add a new meaning which is not stated (“pray Jesus into your heart”). Again, there is not one example of a person “praying Jesus into his or her heart” in the New Testament. The last problem with this interpretation is that after Jesus makes this statement (John 5:24), he continues to make statements which are contradictory to those people’s views such as John 8:31-32: “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’”

Even the evangelical world today is reconsidering these questions about the birth of a Christian compared with the life decision of a disciple of Christ as Baptist Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology David P. Gushee discussed in *Christianity Today* (August 19, 2007):

Is it permissible to reopen the question of salvation? If we do, how will Jesus’ teachings stand up to our inherited traditions?

In reading through Luke, I had discovered that twice (10:25, 18:18) Jesus is asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

...Trying to be an honest expositor of the texts in front of me, I told the chapel students that morning that on the two occasions in Luke when Jesus was asked about the criteria for admission to eternity, he offered a fourfold answer: love God with all that you are, love your neighbor (like the Samaritan loved his neighbor), do God's will by obeying his moral commands, and be willing, if he asks, to drop everything and leave it behind in order to follow him.

I concluded by suggesting that the contrast between how Jesus answers this question and how we usually do is stark and awfully inconvenient.

In my Baptist tradition, especially, we direct people to “invite Jesus into your heart as your personal Savior,” an

act undertaken using a formula called the “sinner’s prayer.” Or we simply say, “Believe in Jesus, and you will be saved.”

But Jesus never taught easy believism. Whether he was telling the rich young ruler to sell all and follow him or telling a miracle-hungry crowd near Capernaum that to do the work of God was, yes, to believe on him (John 6:28-29), he called people to abandon their own agenda and trust him radically. Radical trust calls for both belief and action.

I suggest that we tend to confuse the beginning of the faith journey with its entirety. Yes, believe in Jesus—that’s the first step... Then, empowered by God’s grace, embark on the journey of discipleship, in which you seek to love God with every fiber of your being, to love your neighbor as yourself, to live out God’s moral will, and to follow Jesus where he leads you, whatever the cost.

If Jesus is to be believed, inheriting eternal life involves a comprehensive divine assessment at every step along our journey, not just at its inception.

Mediocrity and hypocrisy characterize the lives of many avowed Christians, at least in part because of our default answer to the salvation question. Anyone can, and most Americans do, “believe” in Jesus rather than some alternative savior. Anyone can, and many Americans sometimes do, say a prayer asking Jesus to save them. But not many embark on a life fully devoted to the love of God, the love of neighbor, the moral practice of God’s will, and radical, costly discipleship.

If it comes down to a choice between our habitual, ingrained ways of talking about salvation and what Jesus himself said when asked the question, I know what I must choose.

2. “Baptism Does Not Save You—We Are Saved by Faith Alone”

The phrase “baptism does not save you” *is not* in the Bible. The phrase “*baptism now saves you*” is in the Bible. In 1 Peter 3:21, the apostle Peter says “baptism now saves you...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Acts 2:38 teaches that sin is forgiven and the Holy Spirit given at baptism. Paul’s sins were forgiven at his baptism in Acts 22:16.

The phrase “we are saved by faith alone” *is not* in the Bible. The phrase “*man is justified by works, and not by faith alone*” is in the Bible (James 2:24) but is not the focus of this discussion. Ephesians 2:8 states “for by grace you have been saved through faith.” Again, the book of James shows that “faith without works is useless” (James 2:20). Martin Luther added the word “alone” in Ephesians 2:8 in order to justify his own man-made doctrines. Martin Luther also did not consider the book of James as equal with the other scriptures because of its emphasis on faith and works. Luther states his comparison between the book of James and the rest of the New Testament, “Therefore St. James’ Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.”⁶¹ T.W. Brents expounds on this erroneous practice by religious people who added to the Bible to justify their own doctrine:

But Paul says: “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. v:1. By supplying the word *only* or *alone* after the word *faith*, this passage has been made to negative (sic) the doctrine of baptism for remission of sins by setting up the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If this be the correct interpretation of the passage, then the word *alone* may be supplied in the *reading*; thus: “Being justified by faith *alone* we have peace with God.” Then how are we to reconcile this statement with others made by Paul himself? If we are justified by *faith alone*, we are justified by faith to the *exclusion* of every thing else; yet, in the same chapter from which the above quotation is made, he says: “Much more,

⁶¹ David Berçot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1989), 112.

then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Ver. 9. Does Paul thus flatly contradict himself in the same chapter? Again he says: "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Rom. iii:24. Once more: "Ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor. Vi:11. Now, how can we be justified by ALL these things and justified by any one of them alone? We may be justified by grace, but not by grace alone; by Christ, but not by Christ alone; by blood, but not by blood alone; by the Spirit, but not by the Spirit alone; in the name of the Lord Jesus, but not by His name alone; by faith, but not by faith alone; by works, but not by works alone. We live by *breathing*, but not by breathing alone; we live by *eating* but not by eating alone; we live by *sleeping*, but not by sleeping alone; we live by *exercise*, but not by exercise alone. A place for every thing, and every thing in its place, is God's order everywhere.

But if we may supply the word *alone* after the word *faith*, in Rom. v:1, why may we not do the same thing elsewhere? If the phrase "by faith" means *by faith alone*, then we may supply the word *alone* and make sense wherever this form of expression occurs. Shall we try a few passages, to see whether or not the phrase "by faith" means *by faith alone*? "By faith *alone* Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Heb. Xi:4. "By faith *alone* Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." Ver. 7. "By faith *alone* Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." Ver. 8. That is, he sat perfectly still, went nowhere, nor did anything only by faith! "By faith *alone* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." Ver. 17. That is, by faith *alone* he went three days' journey to a mountain shown him by the Lord; by faith *alone* he built an altar; by faith *alone* he bound his son upon the altar; and by faith *alone* he raised his knife and would have slain him had not the Lord interposed!! And thus we might go through the whole list of examples given in this chapter, but these are sufficient to show the absurdity of supplying the word

*alone or only after faith.*⁶²

Colossians 2:12 teaches that people are saved through faith in the working of God by the blood of Jesus at the time of baptism. One should also remember that the story of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion illustrated baptism was the response to the gospel which Philip had preached to him (Acts 8).

After seeing the resurrection of Jesus and being blinded, Saul/Paul surely had faith. Saul was so impacted by the experience that he decided to pray continually. Saul also fasted from both food and water for three days. According to the office of Dr. Richard Wexler M.D., the three day fast from food and water (whether a complete seventy-two hours or forty-eight hours plus a few hours similar to Jesus' entombment) combined with hot weather or sickness could have put Saul near physical death. An average adult in stable circumstances can survive without food and water for only up to seven days. Ananias tells Saul to focus on his spiritual life by telling him how to get his sins forgiven, stating: "And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins..."

If a "sinner's prayer" or just "accepting the Lord" or "receiving Christ" were the biblical precedence, a person would think that after three days of constantly seeing the resurrected Christ replayed in his mind's eye, of prayer, and of fasting, Paul's sins would have been forgiven? Luke shows that Paul did not wait until after eating and drinking the physical life-saving food and water (Acts 9:18-19). Instead, Ananias tells Saul to be baptized and to wash his sins away. The servant of Jesus implies that Saul needs to make a response to the love of Jesus and do something to show his acceptance of the grace of God. Notice that Jesus told Saul to go to Damascus and that Ananias would tell him "what he must *do*" (Acts 9:6 emphasis mine).

Fred Morgan, in a class he teaches on Galatians, adds another biblical proof to show that salvation by "faith only" is false doctrine:

The concept of becoming a Christian by "faith only" is shown to be flawed from Galatians 3:1-29. The key to this passage is understanding *who* can be justified by faith. Paul writes that justification by faith is promised to Abraham and to his Seed, not seeds (as in many), but Seed, as in

⁶² T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 434-435.

Christ (vv. 6-9,16). This presents a serious problem. We cannot be justified by law (vv. 10-12) but God never promised justification by faith to us, only to Abraham and to Christ. The purpose of baptism (vv. 26-29) is to get us into Christ so that we can be justified by faith. Notice verse 29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." So by being baptized into Christ, we have clothed ourselves with Christ, making it possible to be justified by faith. Until you are in Christ, you are still under the covenant of justification by law, no matter how great your faith. To get in the new covenant of justification by faith, you have to be baptized into Christ.⁶³

If someone still insists on saying that baptism is a "work," how then is a person's confession with their mouth not a "work?" How can saying a prayer not be a "work?" How can even the firing of neurons in a person's brain while making a decision to follow Jesus not also be a "work?" They are all physical works but not the works of the Jewish law. It is also worth noting that even Billy Graham's states in his *Four Steps to Peace with God*, "Fourth, you must confess Christ publicly."⁶⁴ If salvation is by "faith alone" as he asserts elsewhere, why "must" a person do a physical act to ensure salvation?

David Berçot, in his book *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?*, gives some great insight into salvation by grace.

Like Schaeffer, most evangelical writers give the impression that the belief that our own merits and works affect our salvation was something that gradually crept into the church *after* the time of Constantine and the fall of Rome. But that's not really the case.

The early Christians universally believed that works or obedience play an essential role in our salvation. This is probably quite a shocking revelation to most evangelicals. But that there's no room for doubt concerning this matter, I

⁶³ Fred Morgan teaches this proof in a class on Galatians. Fred and his wife, Amy (an excellent editor), are disciples of Christ in the Buffalo, NY area.

⁶⁴ Billy Graham, *The Collected Works of Billy Graham* (New York, NY: Inspiration Press), 287.

have quoted below (in approximate chronological order) from early Christian writers of virtually every generation—from the time of the Apostle John to the inauguration of Constantine...

In fact, *every* early Christian writer who discussed the subject of salvation presented this same view...

Does This Mean That Christians *Earn* Their Salvation By Works?

No, the early Christians did not teach that we earn salvation by an accumulation of good works. They recognized and emphasized the fact that faith is absolutely essential for salvation, and that without God's grace nobody can be saved...You may be saying to yourself, "I'm confused"...Our problem is that Augustine, Luther, and other Western theologians have convinced us that there's an irreconcilable conflict between salvation based on grace and salvation conditioned on works or obedience. They have used a fallacious form of argumentation known as the 'false dilemma,' by asserting that there are only two possibilities regarding salvation: it's either (1) a gift from God or (2) it's something we earn by our works.

The early Christians would have replied that a gift is no less a gift simply because it's conditioned on obedience. Suppose a king asked his son to go to the royal orchard and bring back a basket full of the king's favorite apples. After the son had complied, suppose the king gave his son half of his kingdom. Was the reward a gift, or was it something the son had earned? The answer is that it was a gift. The son obviously didn't earn half of his father's kingdom by performing such a small task. The fact that the gift was conditioned on the son's obedience doesn't change the fact that it was still a gift.

The early Christians believed that salvation is a gift from God but that God gives His gift to whomever He chooses. *And He chooses to give it to those who love and obey him.*

Is their understanding really that strange? I so often hear evangelical Christians say that welfare should only be given to those persons who are truly *deserving*. When they say that certain poor persons are “deserving,” do they mean that welfare constitutes wages earned by such persons? Of course not. They still consider welfare to be a gift. Simply because a person is selective in his giving, it doesn’t change the gift into a wage...

As surprising as all of this may be to you, what I’m about to tell you is even more bizarre. There was a religious group, labeled as heretics by the early Christians, who strongly disputed the church’s stance on salvation and works. Instead, they taught that man is totally depraved. That we are saved solely by grace. That works play no role in our salvation. And that we cannot lose our salvation once we obtain it.

I know what you’re thinking: This group of “heretics” were the real Christians and the “orthodox” Christians were really heretics. But such a conclusion is impossible. I say it’s impossible because the group I’m referring to are the gnostics.⁶⁵

Today, most evangelicals are not Gnostics in the complete sense. But evangelicals do follow false doctrines such as “we are saved by faith alone” which the early church did not follow. Former Southern Baptist minister Rick Mark explains:

I shared the “sinner’s prayer” or “plan of salvation” with at least two thousand people in my fifteen years in the Baptist ministry. It was devastating to realize that I was teaching false doctrine with regard to a sinner’s response to the gospel. I preached the gospel *correctly* (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ), but preached the response to the gospel *incorrectly*. I know that I may never see the vast majority of the people that I “led to Christ,” but it is my determination to now spend the rest of my earthly life sharing the *complete* gospel message. I am excited that God

⁶⁵ David Berçot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1989), 57, 60-62, 66.

has enlightened me about baptism through his Word. By seeking to imitate the humility of Apollos, I now truly understand how to become a biblical Christian and am determined to seek out other Apolloses who are willing to listen to the truth.

In his discussion of 1 Peter 3 in *Life to the Full* Douglas Jacoby states this concept of salvation and the error of simply focusing on a few words:

Some of us are so used to plucking a few words out of verse 21 to talk about baptism that we totally miss Peter's imagery: The water in the days of Noah was that which lifted the ark and separated it from the sinful world. In the same way baptism lifts us upwards through the resurrection of Christ and separates us from the filth of the world. The Flood destroys the world, but brings the faithful few into a whole new world. Baptism, similarly, destroys the old sinful nature and brings us upward into a new life.

About the "conscience" (1 Peter 3:21), we read "...as an *appeal* to God for a good conscience" (NRSV, emphasis added). Some translations read "pledge of a good conscience" (NIV), but that is hardly the meaning of the original word (*eperotema*). Possible meanings in the Greek are "request" and "*appeal*." The only reason to translate it "pledge" is to obscure the connection of baptism with forgiveness of sins. You can't *pledge* to God something you don't yet have, but you can *appeal* to God for a good conscience, which God provides when your sins are washed away.

Finally, Peter speaks bluntly: "baptism saves you." That is what Peter explicitly says. Let theologians quibble, the truth speaks for itself. Certainly baptism without faith doesn't save you, and baptism without repentance doesn't save you. But when baptism is *into* Christ and done with faith and repentance, it saves you! So one can no more be saved without it than Noah and his family could have been brought into a clean new world without a flood and an ark.

Baptism is no source of boasting for us. It is of Christ. It connects us to Christ. It saves because of Christ and his death and resurrection. But precisely because it is *of* Christ, baptism saves us!⁶⁶

1 Peter, written in 64 A.D., illustrates the preaching of the old time gospel preacher who says that truly water is in the plan. Noah's family was saved by God through the flood by the ark. We are saved by God through the flood of baptism by Jesus' death and resurrection. The flood or deluge of Noah's ark destroyed all the wickedness in the world. The deluge of Noah started the world over again. The flood of baptism gives the baptized convert a new start to life ("born again" John 3:3). Just like the resurrected Christ, Paul says in Romans 6:1-5 that the baptized "too walk in newness of life."

G. R. Beasley-Murray, the Professor Emeritus of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, concluded his four hundred page study of baptism with the following words: "In the light of the foregoing exposition of the New Testament representations of baptism, the idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out of harmony with the New Testament itself. Admittedly, such a judgment runs counter to the popular tradition of the Denomination to which the writer belongs, as it does to some of the significant contributions to the study of baptism that have appeared from theologians of other Churches in recent years. But the New Testament belongs to us all and we all stand judged by it."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 89.

⁶⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 263.

3. “Infant Baptism”

The phrase “infant baptism” is not in the Bible. Some people think that “infant baptism” originated in the latter part of the second century. “Infant baptism” (baptism of children at a young age) met with strong resistance from the church. Tertullian opposed it as he said it would be safer and more profitable to wait until faith had formed in the child. In his book on church history, F. W. Mattox traces the development of this doctrine. “First, Irenaeus (early third century) taught that Adam’s sin took away man’s divine likeness. Then, Tertullian (160-220) developed the doctrine into more of its present form; and slightly later, Cyprian made a connection with the need to baptize infants.”⁶⁸

Steve Staten explains one of the biggest reasons this confusion arose:

As soon as we have Latin texts such as the case with Tertullian’s works, a theological difficulty arises. This language is more pragmatic than Greek, it allows for no coinciding realities, but mostly cause/effect relations. Put into the hands of a lawyer like Tertullian, we find formulations that had not existed in earlier Greek texts. For instance, the relation between Adam’s sin and our sin sounds like the original sin that Augustine understood.

To make matters worse, the Latin text from Jerome for Romans 5:12 also sounded like we received Adam’s sin, not just his nature and consequences. Again, there was a great deal of difficulty in translating Greek into Latin, causing Augustine to be predisposed by a sincere difficulty in understanding.

Augustine’s teaching in the fourth century of the doctrine of “Original Sin” (which should be called “Original Guilt”) led to a wholesale acceptance of this false doctrine in the fifth century. Augustine, often considered the “Father of the (Catholic) Church,” stated that because of Adam, each baby was born with sin. Since, according to this false doctrine, each baby was born with sin, if the

⁶⁸ Gordon Ferguson, *Prepared to Answer* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 55.

baby died, the baby's soul would be lost. To ensure that babies would not be lost, "infant baptism" was propagated. Staten further states:

Infant baptism arose in part due to sentimentality. Many writers from the early third century indicate that people were baptizing their young children just before their death, say at age four, before a universal theologian came along to justify it. Since the death rate among children was high, Christian parents probably kept moving the proper baptism period earlier and earlier so their near-death children could have the honor and distinction of baptism. Original Guilt had not yet developed at this time.

The acceptance of "infant baptism" as church doctrine also shows one of the points in time where the church started moving away from the Bible and toward the written tradition of church leaders. "Original Guilt" became official "Catholic doctrine" in A.D. 549. The sister doctrine of "infant baptism," "confirmation," does not have a scriptural basis either. In fact, Martin Luther stated in his treatise *On Rebaptism*, "It cannot be proved by the sacred Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles."

Gordon Ferguson, in commenting about how proponents of infant baptism often cite the circumcision aspect of Colossians 2:9-14, states:

...personal faith is tied inseparably to the act of baptism in the passage.

However, aside from that text, a number of compelling facts demonstrate the invalidity of the attempted parallel:

Circumcision was for the Jews, but baptism is for all nations (Matthew 28:19).

Circumcision was for Jews eight days old, but baptism is for those old enough to believe and repent.

Circumcision was for males only, but baptism is for males and females.

Circumcision was for those already born into the

covenant, but baptism puts us into the covenant under Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

Circumcision placed the one circumcised under the obligation of the Law, but baptism frees us from the Law (Galatians 3:24-29).

Circumcision bore no relationship to the cross, but baptism is into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

Circumcision had no connection to forgiveness of sin, but baptism is expressly for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Circumcision was not connected to the reception of the Holy Spirit, but baptism is followed by our reception of the Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Circumcision caused those circumcised to go on their way *weeping*, but baptism causes those baptized to go on their way *rejoicing*! (Acts 8:36-39).

The timing of teaching and entering the covenant is altogether different in the NT and OT...*In summary, in the OT, people were born and then taught; in the NT, they are taught and then born.* Therefore, attempting to justify infant baptism by trying to compare it to circumcision falls very far short!⁶⁹

Ezekiel 18:20 clearly teaches that “the soul who sins is the one who will die.” Each person is responsible for his actions and will be judged accordingly. The saving power of baptism is only activated by a firm faith in Jesus Christ. A baby cannot have faith. Since people are baptized through faith in the power of God (Colossians 2:12), babies should not be baptized. Baptism is also connected with repentance of sins and Lordship of Christ. There is no way that a baby or even a young child could make the decision to repent of his future sins, be a disciple of Christ, or even confess “Jesus is Lord” before being baptized.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 106-107.

Some religious people claim that in the several household conversions of the Bible children must have been in the family. Although it may be true that some of the families may have had children, it is also clear by looking at each situation that those present heard the message, understood the message, and responded to the message. Those situations include Cornelius' household (Acts 10), in which the angel told him Peter would declare a message by which Cornelius would be saved; Lydia at Philippi, who was baptized with her household (Acts 11); those who believed in the Philippian Jailor's house and were baptized (Acts 16); Paul's baptism of the house of Stephanas who was powerful in the ministry (1 Corinthians 1); and possibly the house of Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1, 4).

One of the first groups to move away from "infant baptism" was the Anabaptists. Bruce L. Shelley explains in his book *Church History in Plain Language* that Anabaptists were the radicals of the sixteenth century. Shelley notes, "They had come to their convictions like most other Protestants—through the Scriptures." Elsewhere Shelley says:

Even the name "Anabaptist" was pinned on them by their enemies. It meant "rebaptizer" and was intended to associate the radicals with heretics in the early church and subject them to severe persecution. The move succeeded famously.

Actually, the Anabaptists rejected all thoughts of "rebaptism" because they never considered the ceremonial sprinkling of infant baptism as valid baptism...

They discovered a different world in the pages of the New Testament. They found no state-church alliance, no Christendom. Instead the Anabaptists discovered that the apostolic churches were companies of committed believers, communities of men and women who had freely and personally chosen to follow Jesus...

The apostolic churches knew nothing of the practice of baptizing infants. That tradition was simply a convenient device for perpetuating Christendom in a nominal but spiritually impotent society.

The true church, the radicals insisted, is always the community of saints, dedicated disciples, in a wicked world. Like the missionary monks of the Middle ages, the Anabaptists would shape their society by their example of radical discipleship – if necessary, even by death.



Philippi Stream where Lydia was baptized into Christ

The Anabaptists followed the Apostolic tradition of personal faith and confession before baptism...

Finally, the Zurich council lost all patience. On 7 March 1526, it decided that anyone found rebaptizing would be put to death by drowning. Apparently their idea was, "If the heretics want water, let them have it." Within a year, on 5 January 1527, Felix Manz became the first Anabaptist martyr. The Zurich authorities drowned him in the Limmat, which flows through the city. Within four years the radical movement in and around Zurich was practically put to death...

In 1529 the imperial Diet of Speyer proclaimed Anabaptism a heresy and every court in Christendom was obliged to condemn the heretics to death. During the Reformation years, between four and five thousand Anabaptists were executed by fire, water, and sword...

In the sixteenth century the heretics seemed to be destroying the very fabric of society. That is why the voice of conscience was so often silenced by martyrdom.

We hear that voice in a moving letter written by a young mother in 1573, to her daughter only a few days old. The father had already been executed as an Anabaptist. The mother, in an Antwerp jail, had been reprieved only long enough to give birth to her child, "...Oh, that it had pleased the Lord that I might have brought you up, but it seems that it is not the Lord's will...Be not ashamed of us; it is the way which the prophets and the apostles went. Your dear father demonstrated with his blood that it is the genuine faith, and I also hope to attest the same with my blood, though flesh and blood must remain on the posts and on the stake, well knowing that we shall meet hereafter."⁷⁰

Beasley-Murray concurs that "infant baptism" is unscriptural:

⁷⁰ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 247-251.

Here then are the data. The New Testament gives no evidence that infant baptism was practiced in the primitive Church; its theology of baptism is lofty, with no taint of magical conceptions, and it does not allow of application to the baptism of infants...

John Murray, a Presbyterian, stated, "If it is proper to administer baptism to infants, then the import of baptism must be the same for infants as for adults. It cannot have one meaning for infants and another for adults."

Cremer, a Lutheran, expressed himself more strongly. He asked, "Is our baptism also, which we received as new born children, the appropriation of the grace of God, forgiveness of all sins, a bath of regeneration? If this question is answered with a 'No' then our baptism, or the baptism as it is now practiced within Christianity, is not the baptism commanded by the Lord Christ. If it is not that, then it is no baptism at all: no washing of sins, no burial with Christ, no resurrection with him – it is *nothing...no less than nothing!* For then it hinders the real baptism which the Lord Christ has commanded, and therefore it hinders the attainment of grace and the fulfillment of redemption in us...If this baptism were in vain, then the Holy Spirit would be given to nobody; nobody would be saved; in short there would be no church."⁷¹

Babies are born sinless and innocent as Gordon Ferguson shows from his book *Prepared to Answer*:

Ecclesiastes 7:29 states: "This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." Paul said of himself, "Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died" (Romans 7:9). When Paul was old enough to really understand and respond to the commands of God, then sin became a reality for him, and at that point he died spiritually. That seems plain enough, does it not? Jesus told us to become like little children, and talked of

⁷¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 358, 360.

them in a way which made it clear that they are right with God (Matthew 18:1-4, 10). Keep in mind that the children of which he spoke were not baptized, for the doctrine of infant baptism had not yet been invented!

Babies cannot biblically be baptized, nor do they need to be. They do not need forgiveness, for they have nothing for which to be forgiven. They do not need to be saved, because they are already safe.⁷²

⁷² Gordon Ferguson, *Prepared to Answer* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 55.

4. “The Greek ‘*eis*’ in Acts 2:38 Means ‘Because of’ Not ‘for’”

Some religious people will argue that the Greek word “*eis*”, which is translated “for” in “let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” should really be translated “in order to show.” “*Eis*” would then mean that baptism was just an “outward sign of an inward grace,” a grace which had taken place earlier when faith began. Besides the other scriptures cited previously that contradict this perspective, this book includes an appendix of denominational translators with their translations of the Greek word “*eis*” for this passage. It is true that the translation of “*eis*” can mean different things in different contexts in the Greek. Even though some may debate the meaning of “*eis*,” there is no translation debate among Greek scholars about its translation in this scripture, Acts 2:38.

Jack Cottrell (Professor of Theology at Cincinnati Bible Seminary) explains the possible translations of “*eis*.”

The preferred terminology is a matter of considerable controversy since exegetes often try to make the word conform to a preconceived view of baptism. Three main approaches may be identified. The first is that *eis* here retains its most common meaning of *direction or motion toward something*, which includes the concepts of *purpose* and *goal*. On this understanding the purpose or goal of baptism is to bring about forgiveness of sins. This view is consistent with the idea of baptism as a condition for salvation and for entrance into the kingdom of God. A second approach is that *eis* here means *because of*, the idea being that a person is baptized because his sins have already been forgiven. The third view is that *eis* here means the same thing as the preposition *en* (“in”), which does not mean motion toward but simply *location in*. This view posits only a very general connection between baptism and forgiveness, viz., “be baptized *in relation to* forgiveness of sins.” The last two views are preferred by those who reject the conditional relation between baptism and salvation.

Of these three views, the first is clearly the meaning in Acts 2:38 on both lexicographical and contextual grounds. Regarding its actual meaning, a study of the lexicons shows that the primary meaning and the overwhelmingly most common use of *eis* is “motion toward” in any one of a number of senses, the explanation of which takes two full pages in the Arndt and Gingrich lexicon. In this general category the two most common meanings are “moving from one physical place to another” (88 lines in the lexicon) and “goal or purpose” (127 lines—one full page). By contrast only five lines are devoted to the alleged causal use of *eis*. Arndt and Gingrich call this use “controversial” because there is reason to doubt that it ever has this meaning in Greek usage...

The meaning “because of” is highly debatable simply because it has no solid basis in the Greek language as such. The meaning “with reference to” is possible but not likely given its relatively infrequent use. Thus if *eis* has one of these last two meanings in Acts 2:38, that meaning would have to be contextually clear.

In the final analysis the meaning of *eis* in this passage will be determined by the context...We must remember that Peter’s statement is part of his answer to the Jews’ question of crucifying Christ. They specifically asked, “What shall we do?” to get rid of this guilt? Any instruction Peter gave them would have been understood by them in this light, and must be so understood by us today. When he told them to repent and be baptized “*eis* the forgiveness” of their sins, the only honest reading is that baptism is for the *purpose* or *goal* of receiving forgiveness. This meaning is not just warranted but is actually demanded by the context.

The fact that baptism is paralleled here with repentance confirms this meaning. Surely no one questions that Peter is telling his audience to repent for the purpose of bringing about forgiveness of sins...If repentance is for the purpose of bringing about forgiveness, so also is baptism.

Even if the so-called “causal” meaning of *eis* were not in doubt on lexicographical grounds, it would surely be

excluded in Acts 2:38 by the context itself. “Be baptized because your sins have been forgiven” is the exact opposite of what would be expected and required in their situation. The whole point is that the Jews’ sins are *not* forgiven, and they are asking what to do to receive such forgiveness.⁷³

Dana & Mantey’s definitive work on Greek in the New Testament includes the following quotation that recognizes baptism was strictly administered for the forgiveness of sins:

When one considers in Ac. 2:38 repentance as self-renunciation and baptism as a public expression of self-surrender and self-dedication to Christ, which significance it certainly had in the first century, the expression *eis ajestin twon amartwn umvn* may mean for the purpose of the remission of sins. But if one stresses baptism, without its early Christian import, as a ceremonial means of salvation, he does violence to Christianity as a whole...⁷⁴

Another place in the New Testament where the same phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” occurs in the Greek is in Matthew 26:28.

And while they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:26-28).”

If a person takes the false view of “*eis*,” meaning “because of,” Jesus would be saying that he does not have to die on the cross. Jesus would be testifying that his blood of the covenant had already been poured out even before his death. This contradicts the rest of the New

⁷³ Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1994), 57-60.

⁷⁴ H.E. Dana, Th.D., Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas and Julius R. Mantey, Th.D., D.D., Professor of New Testament Interpretation in the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (London: “Unusual Meanings for Prepositions in the Greek New Testament”, 1923), 104.

Testament teaching on baptism and on how to become a Christian. This view also contradicts the Protestant belief that Jesus' blood of the covenant was on the cross at the time Jesus took the punishment for our sins.

Other places in the New Testament where this arrangement of the Greek is found in regard to conversion are Mark 1:1-22 and Luke 3:3-22. These scriptures describe John's baptism, which also was "for the forgiveness of sins." There is no doubt about what Peter said on Pentecost day. There is no doubt what Matthew, Mark, and Luke meant to say in the Greek. Any attempt to distort this biblical doctrine is either a sincere attempt to follow false traditions created by men or a smoke screen used in order to not obey the biblical way to become a Christian. Therefore one should not be intimidated by an academically lofty question like "Do you know the Greek in Acts 2:38?"

5. “Baptism Is Only an Outward Sign of an Inward Grace”

The phrase “baptism is only an outward sign of an inward grace” is not in the Bible. However, Romans 6:1-5 does state that baptism is the actual participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Although baptism does symbolize many important aspects of the gospel, it is not merely a ritualistic sign, seal, or symbol. The necessity of baptism is an important subject. As Beasley-Murray writes:

Who would have wished to raise the question? It would have sounded as strange to a first generation Christian as many other queries of our time such as, “Is it necessary for a Christian to join the church? Is it necessary to pray? Is corporate worship necessary? Is preaching necessary? Is the Lord’s Supper necessary? Is the Bible necessary? Such matters are self-evident, for they belong to the very structure of the Christian life...”

For Paul, circumcision stood for Judaism and baptism stood for the Gospel; for a Gentile to be circumcised entailed a committal to obedience to the Law of Moses in its entirety (Gal. 5.3), and after baptism to Christ that would mean a virtual cancellation of the believer’s professed dependence on Christ (Gal. 5.2); baptism, however, meant committal to obedience to Christ. The assertion, “Unless you become baptized you cannot be saved” would have sounded to a first generation Christian like saying “Unless you believe and are Christ’s you cannot be a Christian,” and no controversy could have arisen on that basis.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 297-298.

6. “Baptism Is Not Important: Look at What Paul Said to the Corinthians”

The phrases “baptism is not important” and “baptism is not essential for salvation” are not in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-17, Paul does not diminish the importance of baptism; Paul himself was baptized to have his sins forgiven (Acts 22:16). In context, the apostle makes the point that he does not want people solely following men. This occurred because the people were bragging about leaders they were close to and about which leaders baptized them. This destructive practice of dividing the body of Christ in a broad sense is called denominationalism. Denomination means of a name or a group.

Paul mentions baptism several times in this passage and Paul himself baptized several people including the entire household of Stephanas. Paul merely implies that preaching is a more important function than baptizing because anyone can immerse a person in water. How difficult is it to immerse a person in water? Children dunk each other in pools all the time. How easy is it to preach a sermon? How easy is it to help a person make the Bible and Jesus Christ their standard for living? Preaching must come first in order for a person to come to faith (Romans 10:14-15). After a person has come to faith, then he is baptized.

In regard to the structure of Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 1:17, it is an excellent example of an ellipsis, a figure of speech where certain words not directly expressed are understood. Other scriptural examples include 1 Peter 3:3-4 and John 6:27 where Peter and Jesus are not prohibiting things but are rather emphasizing another issue that needs to be discussed. Speaking of the tendency of some people to minimize baptism, Beasley-Murray writes:

...it is generally recognized that so to read this utterance is to abuse it and to misunderstand Paul’s sacramental teaching. It may be affirmed with confidence that the man who formulated the baptismal theology in Rom. 6:1f, Gal. 3:26f, and Col. 2:11f did not think lightly of baptism and would not have wished to give the impression that he did. If vv. 14 and 17 are interpreted in the light of the whole paragraph they do not yield a contrary meaning without injustice. The immediate intention of Paul is to express relief that he had baptized few in Corinth “lest any

should say that you were baptized in my name"...

Most scholars regard v. 17 as implying a conviction on Paul's part that his appointed task was to preach the gospel and that the administration of baptism belonged to the office or charisma of others.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., 178-179.

7. “Thief on the Cross Was Not Baptized”

Whether or not he (the thief) was baptized no one knows. Since huge numbers of people had been baptized by John (Matthew 3:5-6), he might well have been. However, this is not the main consideration. This issue is a covenant issue. Jesus himself lived and died under the Judaic covenant. The *Great Commission* baptism of Matthew 28:18-20 was not required nor preached until the day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2. No one could have experienced this baptism before then because it was a baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It was not possible before Jesus accomplished these things, nor could it have been required until the new covenant went into effect. Read Hebrews 9:15-17 with this principle in mind.

And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were {committed} under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid {only} when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. (Hebrews 9:15-17)

Therefore, what the thief did or did not do has little to do with us.⁷⁷

During Jesus' earthly ministry, he had the power to forgive sins (Matthew 9:2-6, Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, 7:50). Also, the New Covenant was not yet in effect because Jesus had not yet died under the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:17). This is similar to a person arguing that they should not pay a parking meter since in the past their grandfather did not have to pay for parking. And since according to Romans 6:2-4 baptism is the actual participation in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, the thief could not have been baptized into Jesus' death, burial, or resurrection.

⁷⁷ Gordon Ferguson, Prepared to Answer (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 115-116.

8. “Believer’s Baptism”

In today’s religious world “believer’s baptism” refers to an adult who has faith in Christ and is baptized but already considers himself or herself previously forgiven by God or in Christ Jesus. The phrase “Believer’s Baptism” is not in the Bible although technically every biblical baptism is of a believer. As previously discussed, a person should not be baptized without belief because baptism without belief is not biblical and makes no difference to the person. However, “Believer’s Baptism” is adult baptism that is done with the understanding that God is not giving the person any spiritual gifts at that point in time. In this view, baptism is simply obedience to the command of Jesus as a way to follow Christ’s example, as a sign to prove that a person believes in Jesus, or to go public as a witness to others who actually view the baptism.

In contrast to this view, Peter talks about the one baptism that Paul mentions (Ephesians 4:1-4) as the one that *saves* a person (1 Peter 3:21). Over the first centuries of Christianity, there was no such thing as a non-baptized Christian (John 3:5, Acts 2:38). Although it is not the same issue, one other thing to consider is that the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19:1-5 who were originally baptized under John’s baptism and then rebaptized under the New Covenant appear to have a similar understanding to “Believer’s Baptism” (even though they not originally baptized during the same covenant). Leaders should especially consider what the Bible actually states about baptism and base what they teach on the word of God rather than on what people taught them or what their church members may believe. Many Christian leaders fear that if they were to mention or emphasize baptism as one of the primary responses to the good news of Jesus along with faith and repentance, baptism might cheapen the grace of God through Christ in some fashion. That is a valid concern. The blood of Christ and the grace of God should never be minimized. Yet, when a person focuses upon personal responses, whether it is through faith, repentance, or baptism, it is easy to focus on ourselves and forget God’s love through Jesus’ death on the cross.

Although it is obvious from the Bible scriptures discussed previously that God actually does confer grace and spiritual gifts to the believer at the time of baptism, who has the right to restrict God’s freedom and power to also extend grace whenever or wherever he chooses? As the New Testament restorationist attempts to

systematically document the Bible doctrines and organize the church, could it be that God can actually also work outside of His own New Covenant prescriptions recorded in God's Word? This is a really scary concept to many of us! When we define our systems, we feel very comfortable with them. They make sense, they are logical and objective, and we can easily define where the kingdom of God's borders are located. But what if God might also work outside of our limited expectations for those who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, potentially similar to the way that Jesus told the thief on the cross he would be with him in paradise? One may leave judgment to God while taking God's imperatives seriously. One may respect and love the pious non-immersed while insisting that God has set forth faith and repentance and baptism as instrumentally effective in bringing about the forgiveness of sins.

This concept of God's working outside of the Bible scares many of us for obvious reasons. What about the people who claim the Holy Spirit led them to do x, y, or z? What about the charismatic preacher who leads a group in a direction that may be unhealthy in the long run? All of these concerns are reduced when we stay and teach within the boundaries and confines of the New Testament scriptures. But this view does seem to limit how the Holy Spirit can work in our lives. And it scares the Restorationist because it makes one wonder if the written Word might not be sufficient in some fashion while scriptures like John 12:47-48 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 declare the importance of the Scriptures.

While the judgment of one's salvation should be left up to God, every Bible believer along with each minister has a responsibility to teach what the Bible teaches. It must be noted that those who teach others will be judged more strictly (James 3:1). In general, it must be admitted that the Restoration Movement churches (especially churches of Christ) have overemphasized baptism while underemphasizing the good news of Jesus Christ, the beauty of the wretched cross, and faith in general. The proper baptism has become *the primary issue*. In the New Testament church, baptism was NOT *the primary issue* and we should resist the temptation to respond to today's doctrinal weaknesses in order to overemphasize baptize. This is easy to do when a church or a leader tries to distinguish their differences between themselves and another. However, biblical baptism is far more than just a command to obey. It is a beautiful wedding ceremony for the believer and participation in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. What a privilege for

a believer to be baptized and identified with our Savior as we are baptized into Christ Jesus!

9. “Baptism Through Pouring or Sprinkling”

The phrase “baptism through pouring or sprinkling” is not in the Bible. It probably originated in the second century for those who were physically unable to be immersed. “Baptism through pouring or sprinkling” met with strong resistance from some in the church. The first significant challenge to immersion came in the third century A.D. While near death in 251 A.D., a man named Novatian asked for baptism to save his soul. Because it was thought he could not have survived the movement involved in full immersion, water was poured all around his body while he lay on the bed. By the fifth or sixth century, pouring and sprinkling had widespread acceptance as it was easier than immersion, and because of the false doctrines of “infant baptism” and “original guilt.” Northern countries tended to accept it more quickly because of their colder climates. Brents notes that the official church laws for sprinkling came centuries after the apostles were dead:

The first general law for sprinkling was obtained in the following manner: Pope Stephen II, being driven from Rome by Adolphus, king of the Lombards, in 753, fled to Pepin, who a short time before had usurped the crown of France. Whilst he remained there, the monks of Cressy, in Brittany, consulted him whether, in case of necessity, baptism poured on the head of the infant would be lawful. Stephen replied that it would. But though the truth of this fact be allowed—which, however, some Catholics deny—yet pouring or sprinkling was admitted only in *cases of necessity*. It was not till the year 1311 that the legislature, in a council held in Ravenna, declared immersion or sprinkling to be indifferent.⁷⁸

According to teacher and evangelist Douglas Jacoby these are the popular Greek words for the modes of administering water in the New Testament: the Greek word, “cheo,” meaning “pour,” is never used in the New Testament in connection with baptism; the Greek

⁷⁸ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 226, 227, 230, 231.

word, “hrantidzo,” meaning “sprinkle,” is never used in the New Testament in connection with baptism; the Greek word, “hydraino,” meaning “apply water,” is never used in the New Testament in connection with water baptism; the Greek word, “baptidzo,” meaning “immerse,” is the one word always used in the New Testament for baptism.⁷⁹ Translation takes an equivalent word from one language into another language. Transliteration creates a new word in the target language which allows a more subjective interpretation.

Jacoby later records:

Often it is said that the King James translators chose to *transliterate* the word *baptidzo* instead of to *translate* it, in order to avoid embarrassing the king. In fact, transliteration of the word dates back at least as early as the 5th century. The Latin Vulgate translation (completed in 405 A.D.) of Acts 2:38 reads:

Petrus vero ad illos: Paenitentiam, inquit, agite, et baptizetur unusquisque vestrum in nomine Iesu Christi...[Peter replied to them, “Do penance, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ...]

The Catholic church adopted *baptidzo* into their language (Latin) as *baptizo*. Why? Infant baptism appears to have been first practised in the 2nd century, although it was rare until the 3rd century. By the 5th century infant baptism was widespread. In light of this it is hardly surprising that the Latin church chose to create a new word, *baptizo*, instead of using the normal Latin verb *immergere* [to immerse].⁸⁰

Although New Testament Greek is not typically spoken today, twentieth century Greek is derived from it. This results in the Greek Orthodox church knowing what baptism meant in the early “Koine” Greek. The Greek Orthodox church immerses infants. Dr. Moses Stewart proves this point as he states that these “sprinklings” became at length quite common in the Western church, but “the mode of

⁷⁹ Douglas Jacoby, *Shining Like Stars* (London, England: London Church of Christ, 1990), 193.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

baptism by immersion in the Oriental church [Greek Orthodox] has always continued to be preserved even down to the present time.”⁸¹

Remember Acts 8 where Philip goes down into the water to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch and comes back up out of the water. John also went to an area of the Jordan where there was much water to baptize. In both Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12, baptism is equated with physical burial. At death, most bodies are buried under several feet of soil. Imagine trying to bury a person’s body by sprinkling a handful of dirt on it.

T.W. Brents, in his book *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* shows several examples of the actual Greek uses of “baptism”:

Polybius, born 205 years before Christ, History, book I, chap. 51, 6. In his account of the sea fight at Drepanum, between the Romans and Carthaginians, describing the advantages of the latter in their choice of a position, and in the superior structure and more skillful management of their vessels, he says:

“For, if any were hard pressed by the enemy, they retreated safely, on account of their fast sailing, into the open space; and then with reversed course, now sailing round and now attacking in flank the more advanced of the pursuers, while turning and embarrassed on account of the weight of the ships and the unskillfulness of the crews, they made continued assaults and submerged (BAPTIZED) many of the vessels.”

The same work, book iii, ch 72, 4. Speaking of the passage of the Roman army, under the consul Tiberius, through the river Tebia, which had been swollen by heavy rains, he says:

“They passed through with difficulty, the foot soldiers immersed (baptized) as far as to the breast.”

Josephus, born A.D. 37, *Jewish Antiquities*, book xv, ch. 3,3. Describing the murder of the boy Aristobulus, who (by

⁸¹ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 309.

Herod's command) was drowned by his companions in a swimming-bath, says:

“Continually pressing down and immersing (baptizing) him while swimming, as if in sport, they did not desist till they had entirely suffocated him.”

The same writer, *Life of Himself*, sec. 3, says:

“For our vessel having been submerged (baptized) in the midst of the Adriatic, being about six hundred in number, we swam through the whole night.”⁸²

It would be hilarious to see the competing ships trying to get close enough to the enemy ships to sprinkle or pour water onboard so that the opposing navy would be shipwrecked and destroyed! *Can you visualize that scene?*

Even in the Roman Catholic Church in recent years, there has been renewed recognition of the significance of baptism by immersion, arising from the work of the Second Vatican Council. Immersion is now encouraged as a fuller sign of baptism, as it pictures Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Even still, immersion has seen little progress in the local parish church, mainly because the buildings have baptismal fonts and do not have baptisteries. One of the most modern translations, *The English Version for the Deaf*⁸³, translates the word as “baptism” but places the following footnote at every occurrence of “baptism” or “baptize”: “A Greek word meaning to be immersed, dipped or buried briefly under water.”

L. G. Tomlinson writes about being *born of water* (John 3:5), “To be born means to come out. No one ever heard of a child being born of a mother smaller than itself. Likewise to be born of the water requires a larger body of water than the one baptized.”⁸⁴

Dr. H. F. York also comments on the problem with substituting pouring or sprinkling for immersing, as he states:

⁸² Ibid., 226, 227, 230, 231.

⁸³ *The English Version for the Deaf* (Arlington, TX: World Bible Translation Center, Inc.)

⁸⁴ L. G. Tomlinson, *Churches of Today in the Light of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), 136.

What do the words, sprinkle, pour and immerse mean? Webster's New International Dictionary defines them as follows: Sprinkle; To scatter in drops or particles, as water, seed, etc.; Pour; To cause or allow to flow in a stream; Immerse; To plunge; to dip; sink; bury. May we read: "In those days, the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea went out to John, and were sprinkled by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." Now then, let us try the definition: "In those days, the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea went out to John and were scattered in drops or particles, as water, seed, etc. by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins." What an absurdity! What an impossibility! The only way a person could be sprinkled is to have their body cremated and then have someone else sprinkle their physical body's ashes.⁸⁵

Sprinkling a person's body parts into the water is obviously not what Jesus did or meant! In fact, Jesus and John went where there was much water (John 3:23). York continues: "There is not a single instance in the whole Divine Record, where water unmixed with any other substance was ever sprinkled upon a man, woman or child, as a religious rite, or ceremony, by the authority of God, but who were already with the Jewish commonwealth, in or under the old covenant. Therefore, it was never for an initiatory rite, for the way into the Jewish Commonwealth, or Covenant was by a birth—natural birth—just as the way into the church of Christ is by a birth."⁸⁶

Some refer to Ezekiel 36:22-25 as the reason for Great Commission baptism by sprinkling. This "clean water" that Ezekiel is referring to was defined by God to Moses as running water mixed with the ashes from a red heifer (without spot, blemish and which never had a yoke on it) burnt together with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet (Numbers 19:1-19). L. G. Tomlinson concludes a study on sprinkling from the whole Bible with the following summary:

1. Ashes, blood, oil, scarlet wool, hyssop, ashes of a red heifer, ashes of cedar wood, dust and clean water are said to be sprinkled.

⁸⁵ H. F. York, *The Plan Behind the Plea* (Diamond, MO: Armokan Publishing Company, 1948), 59-60.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

2. Nowhere in the Old or New Testament is water alone (nothing but water) ever said to be sprinkled upon any one or anything.

3. Baptism is done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, but sprinkling was done in no name.

4. No reference on sprinkling even hints at baptism.

5. The great Scriptural commands of obedience to the Gospel are faith, repentance and baptism. Paul said: "Let us draw near with a true heart (faith) in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (repentance), and our bodies washed with pure water (baptism)" (Heb. 10:22).

Note: Baptism is a washing (Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5).⁸⁷

⁸⁷ L. G. Tomlinson, *Churches of Today in the Light of Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955), 146.

10. “Baptism for the Dead”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon church) teaches an alluring doctrine that those who have died outside of Christ have another chance for salvation in the hereafter. The Mormon doctrine of salvation for the dead eliminates the false dilemma that God would be unfair if he did not offer the gospel to those in the spirit world who had never heard it during their mortal lives. Those in the spirit world would need the knowledge of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice and the ordinance of water baptism.⁸⁸ Thus, the Mormon church holds to *proxy* baptisms for people who have already died but were not baptized. My wife grew up in the LDS church as a Temple Mormon and was immersed for fifteen dead people who had the last name beginning with ‘M’ in the Washington DC Temple.

The baptism for the dead can only be performed in a Mormon temple and is one of the primary functions of the Mormon temple system. Baptism for the dead is a Latter-day Saint’s solemn duty. Joseph Smith, the misguided founder of Mormonism (killed in a shoot-out in the old jail in Carthage, Illinois—three blocks from the house where I grew up), claimed 1 Corinthians 15:29 as his only text for this doctrine. It should be noted that the Book of Mormon is silent about salvation of the dead and baptism for the dead even though it claims to be the “fullness of the everlasting gospel.” The Mormon scriptures outside the Book of Mormon that do mention these subjects are distorted interpretations of 1 Peter 3:18-20, 4:6, and 1 Corinthians 15:29. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that man’s eternal destiny is fixed at death, as 2 Corinthians 5:10, 6:2, Luke 16:9-31 and Hebrews 9:27 state. Even the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* acknowledges that there is no extra-biblical mention of baptism for the dead, “a practice for which we have no other evidence in the Pauline or other New Testament or early Christian writings.”⁸⁹

In dealing with 1 Corinthians 15:29, clearly this subject is merely *mentioned*, not taught. The context of the entire chapter is the resurrection of the dead, which we take for granted but which was

⁸⁸ “The Mormon Doctrine of Salvation for the Dead,” *Christian Research Journal*, Volume 20:2 November-December 1997 (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Christian Research Institute), 22-27.

⁸⁹ “Baptism for the Dead-Ancient Sources,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:97.

considered foolishness in ancient Greek culture (Corinth was a Greek city and note the Greek reaction to Paul in Acts 17:18-34).

There have been many interpretations of this scripture over the years. Beasley-Murray mentions that British scholars Robertson and Plummer favored the idea of people being baptized “out of affection or respect of the dead.”⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray concluded, “In my judgment we have to admit with Bultmann that baptism for the dead represents an unethical, sub-Christian sacramentalism.”⁹¹

The idea of a fringe group of the church that changed the biblical doctrine of baptism is supported by 1 Corinthians 15:29. Paul had been using “us” and “we” for the first part of the scripture. Paul then changes abruptly to the pronouns “they” and “them.” Immediately afterward, he reverts back to using “us” and “we.” Note that he consistently addressed his readers as “you” (vv. 1, 2, 3, 11, 12, 14, 17, 31, 34, 36, 51, 58) or (including himself) “we” or “us” (vv. 3, 15, 19, 30, 32, 49, 51, 52). Paul is talking about a group of people not following the apostles’ doctrine. The only reason he even brings them up is in an argument to prove that even “*they*” believe in the resurrection.

Other considerations include the following. Since Paul was painfully aware that many of his own Jewish kinsmen were outside of Christ (Romans 9:1-3, 10:1-4), why would he exclude himself from being baptized for them? Although it is a weaker argument, history has also pronounced the apostle’s judgement as the practice of baptism for the dead never became widespread. Also, Paul elsewhere used examples that he disagreed with to make a theological point (1 Corinthians 8:10 v. 10:23-ff). Lastly, a possible over emphasis on baptism alone in Corinth could have promoted the baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 1:17).

As with other distortions in the biblical view of baptism, the Later-day Saints’ baptism for the dead unfortunately promotes the controversy and mistrust of baptism and the biblical salvation process.

⁹⁰ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 186.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 358, 360.

11. “Baptism of Blood – Salvation Through Martyrdom”

Another doctrine that was added to the set of practices of the early church during the time of Tertullian is the “*Baptism of Blood*,” the martyrdom of candidates for baptism. Since extensive requirements prior to baptism came into being, it became possible for one studying to become a Christian (a “catechumen”) to fall victim to persecution prior to being baptized. In these cases, the church considered that the person would be saved due to the “baptism of blood.” Early catholics took baptism to be essential, and were faced with the dilemma of how a martyred catechumen might be saved, hence the baptism of blood. Consider Tertullian:

We have indeed, likewise, a second font, (itself one with the former,) of blood, to wit; concerning which the Lord said, “I have to be baptized with a baptism,” when He had been baptized already. For He had come “by means of water and blood,” just as John has written; that He might be baptized by the water, glorified by the blood; to make us, in like manner, called by water, chosen by blood. These two baptisms He sent out from the wound in His pierced side, in order that they who believed in His blood might be bathed with the water; they who had been bathed in the water might likewise drink the blood. This is the baptism which both stands in lieu of the fontal bathing when that has not been received, and restores it when lost. (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 16)

While God always has the final authority, there are two primary concerns with the “baptism of blood.” The first is that it misunderstands Jesus’ own reference to a figurative baptism of suffering (Mark 10:38-39, Luke 12:50). It assumes that one baptism is substituted for the other based upon a dubious symbolic interpretation of a particular passage. John also spoke of a baptism with fire (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16) to be given by Jesus. This baptism of fire was one of change and destruction and hardly substituted for baptism with water. Again, baptism of the Holy Spirit existed at one time in the church and those who received it still needed baptism with water (Acts 1:15, 10:47-48, 11:16-17). And later in the church, Paul could

say there was *one* baptism (Ephesians 4:5). The other problem with this “baptism of blood” is that it was not known in the apostolic church. Since water baptism was practiced immediately upon one’s faith and decision to surrender one’s life to Jesus, normally there was no period of time that would make such a doctrine necessary.

This doctrine probably originated after some people planned to be baptized but, prior to their baptism, they were in fact martyred. The church struggled to find a way that these could be regarded as saved, and baptism of blood served this purpose. God is sovereign and the judgment day is his alone and this could be an excellent example of how one false doctrine (delay of baptism or associating too many requirements with it) ballooned into another false doctrine (baptism of blood).⁹²

⁹² John Engler, *Keeping the Faith* (Long Beach, CA: Great Commission Illustrated, 1997), 211-212.

12. “If Baptism Is for Forgiveness of Sins, Do I Need to be Baptized Every Time I Sin?”

Some may ask, “Do I need to be baptized every time I sin in order to be forgiven again?” No, baptism is a one-time act. It is the one baptism of Ephesians 4:1-5.

There is no evidence of “rebaptism” in the Bible except in the case of people who did not know about Great Commission baptism (Acts 19:1-5). Baptism is for future sins as well as past sins. To remain in the light after baptism, people should remember that we simply need to stay repentant and confess our sins to God, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Douglas Jacoby, in his commentary on 1 John 1:7-10, has some great words of encouragement in regard to remaining in a right relationship with God after one’s baptism:

Some Christians falsely imagine that when they sin they go back to the darkness, and when they confess they are forgiven again and come back into the light. What agony! What insecurity! What false doctrine! What a misunderstanding of grace, a lapse into Galatians 3:3 theology!

1 John 1:7-9 says that we are purified from sin even *while* we are sinning, because (in our attitude) we are walking in the light. Christians never go back and forth from darkness to light unless they leave the fellowship and at some later time are restored. We have crossed from death to life; that’s settled. Once the bill is paid, we don’t go back to the waitress and “settle up” again! It’s *paid!*

Confession is most important. It needs to be a part of our lifestyle. It is part of walking in the light. However, a Christian who fails to confess *every* sin is not going to be condemned. Imagine the scene at Judgment Day:

God: “Smith, you almost made it. In fact you were one of the more faithful ones. But if you recall that day in

August 1988, the 9th to be precise, you lapsed into laziness in the late afternoon, and you never confessed it!"

Smith: "Oh no, I though I'd confessed everything! [Now sweating] What about my faith and all my deeds? All the church services? No! Not outer darkness!!!"

God: "I'm sorry, Smith, salvation depends on perfect confession. [To angels] Bind him and throw him out!"

Smith: "Aaaaaahhh!"

It's sad that in their hearts many disciples fear this is God's way of dealing with people. They need to know the Savior – as he truly is, not as they imagine him!

Then how *are* Christians forgiven when they sin? Baptism and subsequent confession has been described as "a bath and a shower in the blood of Jesus." We as Christians don't need the bath again, but it sure feels good to shower off the unrighteousness in the presence of God. Granted forgiveness is automatic, so why pray for forgiveness when our relationship with God is secure? Take marriage, for example. When we sin against our spouse, we need to ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness for what purpose? To become married again, or to mend the relationship? Christians ask for God's forgiveness *not* that they might be spared from going to hell (that was taken care of in the waters of baptism), but that their personal relationships with God might be healed. A son or daughter of God confesses sin not to be forgiven of sins already borne by Jesus on the cross, but for forgiveness and healing in the relationship. Salvation is no excuse for not asking for forgiveness when we have hurt God.⁹³

Lastly, the Corinthian church was in poor shape spiritually according to Paul (1 Corinthians 1:10-17, 3:1-9, 16-ff, 4:14-6:1, 6:7-11, 11:17-12:1, 15:12), yet amidst Paul's corrections he never mentioned that they needed to get "rebaptized." Also, even though Simon sinned immediately after getting baptized, Peter did not tell him to get "rebaptized" (Acts 8:9-24).

⁹³ Douglas Jacoby, *Life to the Full* (Woburn, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 1995), 147-148.

13. “Jesus Wasn’t Baptized for the Forgiveness of Sins and We are to Follow His Example”

A person is to follow the example of Christ (1 John 2:6; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Although it is true that Jesus was not baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, Jesus did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). However, the fact that he did not sin should indicate that a difference between his baptism and every other person’s baptism. Jesus had no guilt and no need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Every person other than Jesus has guilt and needs to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Note also that the Holy Spirit in a form of a dove came down on Jesus when he was baptized, while we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we are baptized into Christ.

So why was Jesus baptized? Do those who make this argument against baptism carry it out to its logical conclusion and submit to baptism for the same reason Jesus did? John the Baptist stated why he baptized Jesus:

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ “And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” And John bore witness saying, “I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus (John 1:29-37).

The reason that John baptized Jesus was not for the forgiveness of his

sins, but to enable God to show John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah who was prophesied in the Old Testament! The Spirit of God descended on the Messiah in the form of a dove.

Is there anyone today who ought to be baptized for the same reason Jesus was? Of course not.

14. “Why Does It Take a Person Longer Than a Few Hours to be Baptized?”

If a person studies New Testament conversions in the Bible, they will probably notice that biblical baptisms occurred immediately and spontaneously when the person decided to repent and believe the good news about Jesus Christ. So in this day and age, baptism does not need to take longer but it might be wise to consider some reasons why it might take longer?

The first reason is that today there are so many different teachings about salvation and baptism within the worldwide Christian religion. All too often a person is taught that they became a Christian at birth, at their sprinkling as a child, at their initial faith in Jesus during childhood, at catechism, at the time of a special sinner’s prayer or altar call, etc. That person needs to exercise humility to admit that they were taught incorrectly and that they should follow the biblical response rather than simply trust the way their trusted teacher or family member or friend taught them. Often, it takes some scriptural study and prayer and reflection before a person will accept that a trusted advisor accidentally taught them wrong. As well, the radical concept of accepting Jesus as Lord for their life is a challenge to the heart that needs to be worked through.

Another reason that it takes people longer is that today’s society is a non-biblical society compared with the Jewish and Gentile God-worshippers of the first century. In their day, the Jews were more prepared to make a decision to follow the Messiah. They were looking forward to the savior coming into the world. They saw the temple of God in all its glory. Most of them were personally related descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Today, we are not brought up with that type of historical context, background, and family life and so are not as prepared to make the decision to let Jesus Christ be the Lord of our lives. Also, notice that according to the book of Acts, teaching over some period of time seems to have been necessary in the “gentile” churches—Berea, Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus.

As well, some churches have special baptism services, which institutionalize the procedure of baptism. While it may be helpful to show baptisms in front of the congregation, there is no reason to wait for a special service or for it to be in front of the congregation. There are many pools and hot tubs open for baptisms anytime and with digital photography, churches can easily show the baptisms publicly.

15. “What About Rebaptism?”

Is there ever a need to be “rebaptized” or to denunciate a former baptism and be baptized in the scriptural manner? There is only one case of “rebaptism” in the New Testament (Acts 19:1-5). Some background information can be found in Acts 18:24-28 although it does not specifically state that Apollos was “rebaptized.”⁹⁴ In Acts 19:1-5, the baptisms of the twelve Ephesian disciples are found lacking in some way although they had been previously immersed for the forgiveness of sins. Because Paul found their baptism lacking, they were “rebaptized.”

There are four basic parts of a proper New Covenant or Great Commission baptism listed in the chart below.

SUBJECT	A repentant believer	Acts 2:38, 8:37, Col. 2:12
MODE	A burial (immersion) in water	Rom. 6:3-5, Col. 2:12
AUTHORITY	In the name of Jesus Christ or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	Acts 2:38, 19:1-5, Matthew 28:18-20
PURPOSE	The forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in Christ Jesus	Acts 2:38, 19:1-5, 22:16, Gal. 3:25-26

In Acts 19:1-5, the proper Subject and Mode were present but the scriptural Authority and Purpose were not. Therefore, the twelve Ephesian disciples were “rebaptized.” A Great Commission baptism should contain these four parts.

Although this concept has been referred to as “rebaptism,” it is not technically “rebaptism” since the person is being “baptized into Christ” for the first time (the one saving baptism of Ephesians 4:4-6 and 1 Peter 3:21). The only “rebaptisms” occurred to those in the New Testament days that were baptized by John the Baptist or by the movement that he began and then were later “rebaptized” in the name

⁹⁴ It is an interesting but inconclusive study to consider whether or not Apollos, the twelve apostles, or those baptized before Pentecost by John’s or Jesus’ disciples were “rebaptized” and when they received the indwelling Holy Spirit. Douglas Jacoby sets up some of the possible scenarios in his book, *The Spirit*.

of Jesus Christ to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵ The twelve Ephesian disciples were thus true “rebaptisms” since they were baptized under God’s authority twice, once under John’s baptism and once in regard to Great Commission baptism.

Many times, when people attach special significance to an act that they have decided to perform, they eventually reconsider whether that act was valid. This occurs when people accept the Lord multiple times through prayer, question their baptism, or even reconsider their marriage. Most often, this is a result of placing way too much emphasis on the initiation rights, human works, or the “proper understanding” rather than the grace of God. After I was baptized into Christ and was “born from above,” I became involved in a group of people who emphasized that I had to understand baptism perfectly and exhibit repentance completely in their terminology before being baptized. Because of this emphasis on the response with the works-oriented/graceless desire to “make sure” that I was right with God, I was baptized again. However, when I really took time to think about this without the relational influence and poor doctrines associated with it, I realized that by doing this I was trying to please man and was too influenced by man rather than responding to the gospel of Christ through God’s word alone. It would be best to not add requirements to a person coming in faith to be baptized.

⁹⁵ Outside the New Testament, Naaman was also “rebaptized” since he was dipped in the Jordan River seven times to remove his leprosy although he baptized himself (2 Kings 5:13-14).

Appendix E

What the Early Christians Really Said About Baptism

The next best witnesses after the New Testament documents to the doctrines of the early church were the early Christian writers.⁹⁶ They lived much closer to the actual setting of the New Testament in several ways: chronologically 50-350 years from the NT versus our 1950 years from the NT; geographically living in the Mediterranean region in a similar setting to first century Israel (other than not having the Temple); and perhaps most importantly, they acquired teachings directly from the apostles and from the disciples of the apostles by word of mouth.

Despite these facts, looking back from the twentieth century perspective, the weaknesses of the early Christian writers can be seen. To begin with, even though they were closer in time to the apostolic teaching than we are, there are very few early church writings before 160 A.D., let alone on conversion/baptism. It must be remembered that over 100 years had elapsed from the time of most of the NT letters being written and 130 years from the actual events recorded in the gospels, which is not an inconsequential amount of time (many of us don't remember what clothes we wore yesterday). From 197 to 390 one easily sees the additions of more false doctrines.

The early Christians rely too much on allegory. They tend to see allegory where others cannot and where it probably should not be. They also tended to include some issues about the "orthodox" church

⁹⁶ Dr. Peter Gorham originally wrote this section but it has been updated extensively by Rex Geissler using the patristic quotes from David Berçot's *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 51-62. Berçot lists the author, time period, Eastern or Western writer or influence, volume of the Ante-Nicene Fathers and page. Peter Gorham received his Ph.D. in Physics in 1986 from the University of Hawaii and has authored and published over 40 scientific articles and has a passion for early church writings.

and baptizer (strict requirements for baptism, etc.) in order to deal with heretical sects and to keep the “orthodox” church pure rather than simply obeying the Scriptures without preconditions. They believed some of the myths of the time common to the lands where they lived. Some false doctrines about conversion were propagated in the early church as well. Some of these include: the notion that one should be baptized in running water (perhaps symbolizing living water or the Jordan river); that a person should be baptized three times (once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit); rebaptism of those baptized by anyone outside the “orthodox” church; requirements added before baptism was allowed; and even that the convert should be naked when baptized (this has a parallel outside Christianity in the paintings of Mithraism initiates at Santa Maria Capua Vetere).

Even still, the early Christians’ faith and love of God are something that people can only hope to attain in their lifetime. Thus one can use with care the writings of these disciples, tempered by an understanding of the weaknesses of their time and the constant realization that once outside the Scriptures, a person can quickly go off track. The early Christian writers help to understand the early church’s view of the New Testament standard of the salvation process. People certainly need to be humble in judging anything that these great men contributed to the cause of Christ. These men often paid for their faith with their own blood and that of their families as well.

Modern Protestants often assume that the Catholic church began to corrupt the practices of the New Testament church soon after the end of the first century, and that the Christians of the second through fourth centuries are unreliable witnesses to the “true” early church. However, during the entire range of the violent persecution of the church that went on from around 40 A.D. up to the time of Constantine in the early fourth century, the church was repeatedly purified by the trials to which it was subjected. Even after these persecutions ended, the zeal and faith of those in the first generations that followed were strong and clear-minded.

What Protestants think of as the Catholic church did not exist in any form that would be recognized at least until the 4th century. The faults that Martin Luther fought against would not begin until 1500 A.D. The Greek word “katholike” literally means “universal” or

“whole” or “united.” The word’s use by early church writers was intended not to create a name for an institution, but to express the defining characteristic of unity that signified the early Christians.

The early Christians often used John 3:3-5 as a proof text for baptism. Protestants often claim that Jesus was not referring to baptism in John 3:5. They assume that the “water” mentioned in this passage must refer to the fluid of the birth sac which is released at physical birth. They understand “Spirit” to refer to the spiritual rebirth which Jesus was trying to help Nicodemus understand. Thus Jesus would be saying, “Unless you are first born physically, and then born spiritually, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” The justification for understanding the passage this way then comes from the duality of “flesh” and “spirit” in the sentence that follows.

Jesus’ statement seems trivial when taken in this way, since there is not much point in stressing the necessity of physical birth before spiritual rebirth. Modern commentators reject the “birth-water” interpretation and admit that John 3:5 is most likely referring to baptism. As illustrated by Brents, the early Christians universally accepted that a person must be born again through baptism, of water and the spirit (John 3:3-5), in order to go to Heaven.

Speaking of the primitive fathers, Dr. Wall, the great Pedo-baptist historian, says: “They understood that rule of our Saviour, *‘Except one be regenerated (or born again) of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God,’* of water baptism, and concluded from it that without such baptism, no person could come to heaven—and so did all the writers of these four hundred years, not one man excepted.” Wall’s *History of Infant Bap.*, vol. I, pp. 69, 70.

Thus we have Dr. Wall’s testimony that every writer of the first four hundred years, without a single exception, understood the Saviour to refer to water baptism, and that no man could be saved without it.

Again: on page 147, of the same volume, Dr. Wall says: “There is not any one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language, but what understands it of baptism; and if it be not so understood, it is difficult to give an account how a

person is born of water any more than born of wood." This is strong language, but no writer has ventured to dispute it. If it were not true, and any writer understood it otherwise, his writings would have been produced in refutation of the statement.

But what is the testimony of modern writers on this subject? Mr. Wesley says: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit—except he experience that great inward change by the Spirit and be baptized (wherever baptism can be had) as the outward sign and means of it." Wesley's Notes on John iii:5.

George Whitfield: "*Born of water and of the Spirit: Does not this verse urge the absolute necessity of baptism?*"⁹⁷

Since there is so much controversy over interpretations of the New Testament on this issue, it is worth asking the question: What evidence is there outside of the New Testament for the practices of the early church with regard to baptism? How did the disciples of Jesus in the early church who carried on the teaching in succeeding generations after the apostles treat the issue of baptism?

Clement of Rome, c. 95 A.D.

Clement's "Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians" is among the earliest documents of the Christian church. It was composed some time in the nineties. Clement, who may be mentioned in the New Testament (Phil. 4:3), was a leader in the church at Rome and may well have been a companion of both Peter and Paul. He wrote a long and eloquent appeal to the Corinthians for unity in the church there. He obliquely refers to John 3:3-5 by comparison to Noah in regard to being born a second time.

Noah, being found faithful, proclaimed a second birth to the world by his ministry, and through him the Master

⁹⁷ T.W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1987), 390-391, 393.

saved the living creatures that entered into the ark in harmony.

Clement also recalls the apostle Peter's words in 1 Peter.

For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3:18-22).

Second Letter of Clement, c. 100-150 A.D.

Although this document was at one time attributed to Clement of Rome, it is still held in high regard as one of the authentic writings of the early church. It is viewed by many as an anonymous second century sermon that was preserved along with Clement's first letter. The sermon urges men to stay faithful to God and to have a faith that produces the works of righteousness. The writer makes an oblique reference to John 3:5 when speaking of the saints of the Old Testament. The saints could only ensure their own salvation, not that of their children.

But if even such righteous men as these cannot by their righteous deeds deliver their children, with what confidence shall we enter into the kingdom of God, if we do not keep our baptism pure and undefiled? Or who shall be our advocate, unless we be found having holy and righteous works (Second Letter 6:9)?

The Epistle of Barnabas, c. 70-100 A.D.

This anonymous document which was traditionally attributed to Barnabas, was widely circulated among the early Christians. The document is dated near the end of the first century. Some writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, even considered it to be Scripture. The author mentions baptism when discussing the condition of the Jews who had rejected Jesus.

Concerning the water, indeed, it is written, in reference to the Israelites, that they should not receive that baptism which leads to the remission of sins, but should procure another for themselves. *Barnabas (c. 70-130, E), 1.144.*

Blessed are they who, placing their trust in the cross, have gone down into the water...We indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement. However, we come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and the trust in Jesus in our spirit. *Barnabas (c. 70-130, E), 1.144.*

Ignatius of Antioch, c. 35-107 A.D.

Ignatius was known as a disciple of John the apostle and possibly other apostles. He was third in succession from Peter as the overseer of Antioch (Greek “episkopos,” from epi=over and skopos=seer). Overseer is also translated “bishop” or “elder.” He was arrested and taken to Rome and thrown to the wild beasts in the first decade of the second century. During this trip he wrote seven letters that have survived—six to churches in the region, and one to his friend Polycarp. His letters show a man who was a true disciple by New Testament standards.

He was born and baptized so that by His passion he could purify the water. *Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.57.*

Wherever the overseer remains, let the people also be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church. It is not permitted apart from the overseer either to baptize

or to hold a love-feast; but whatever he shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which you do may be sure and valid (To the Smyrnaeans 8:2).

Please the Captain in whose army you serve, from whom also you will receive your pay. Let none of you be found a deserter. Let your baptism remain with you as your shield; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your perseverance as your body armor. Let your works be your deposits, that you may receive your assets due to you. Be therefore patient one with another in gentleness, as God is with you. May I have joy in you always (To Polycarp 6:2).

Hermas, c. 70-130 A.D.

The author wrote a popular work called *The Shepherd*. *Pilgrim's Progress* is perhaps the best modern comparison to Hermas' work, since "The Shepherd" is a kind of allegorical journey made by the narrator through the process of becoming a disciple and dealing with the trials that Christians face. The work was often attached to copies of the New Testament by early scribes and was regarded by some as part of the New Testament up until the third or fourth century. Origen believed that the author was the Hermas referred to by Paul in Romans 16:14.

I hear, sir, some teachers maintain that there is no other repentance than that which takes place, when we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins. *Hermas (c. 150, W), 2.22.*

Before a man bears the name of the Son of God, he is dead. But when he receives the seal, he lays aside his deadness and obtains life. The seal, then, is the water. They descend into the water dead, and they arise alive. *Hermas (c. 150, W), 2.49.*

The apostles themselves also gave them the seal of the preaching [i.e., baptism]. Accordingly, they descended with

them into the water and ascended again. *Hermas* (c. 150, W), 2.49.

Didache, c. 80-140 A.D.

This anonymous document, with the full title of “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” has been difficult to date with certainty. The document may well be a first century compilation of some early oral teachings. There are some brief references to baptism which indicate that immersion was preferred. It also says that baptism was taken seriously enough that fasting should be done in preparation for it.

Concerning baptism, baptize in this manner. Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water. If you cannot baptize in cold water, baptize in warm. But if you do not have either, pour out water three times upon the person’s head in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, before the baptism, let the baptizer fast, and the one to be baptized, together with whoever else can. But you will instruct the one to be baptized to fast one or two days before (the baptism). *Didache* (c. 80-140, E), 1.379.

A second passage warns that the communion meal should be denied anyone who has not been baptized (though this is not explicitly directed in the New Testament):

But let no one eat or drink of this eucharistic thanksgiving except those that have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said: Do not give that which is holy to the dogs. *Didache* 9:5

In this passage, baptism is taken as the defining characteristic of a Christian. It is the test for those who were allowed to be considered part of the fellowship (whether or not such exclusion was really intended by Jesus).

Justin Martyr, c. 100-165 A.D.

The first of the Christian apologists (defenders of the historical Christian religion), this philosopher, Syrian Greek disciple and tireless evangelist wrote a long defense to the Roman Caesar around 150 A.D. before being martyred in 165 A.D. in Rome. Justin wrote to the Caesar in order to refute the false claims of the enemies of the church.

I will also relate the manner in which we dedicated ourselves to God when we had been made new through Christ.... As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their past sins. The rest of us pray and fast with them. They are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were regenerated ourselves. They there receive the washing with water in the name of God (the Father and Lord of the universe), of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit. For Christ also said, "Unless you are born again, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven." *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.183.*

At our birth, we were born without our own knowledge or choice, but by our parents coming together... In order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe.... And in the name of Jesus Christ...and in the name of the Holy Spirit. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.183.*

This washing of repentance and knowledge of God has been ordained on account of the transgression of God's people, as Isaiah cries. Accordingly, we have believed and testify that the very baptism which he announced is alone

able to purify those who have repented. And this is the water of life.... For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses only the flesh and body? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy and from hatred. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.201.*

We who have approached God through Him have received, not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism by God's mercy, since we were sinners. And all men alike may obtain it. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.216.*

But there is no other [way] than this: to become acquainted with this Christ; to be washed in the fountain spoken of by Isaiah for the remission of sins; and for the rest, to live sinless lives. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.217.*

Christ has redeemed us by being crucified on the tree and purifying us with water. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.242.*

[Addressed to Jews:] We Christians do not receive that useless baptism of cisterns, for it has nothing to do with our baptism of life. *Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.203.*

We represent our Lord's suffering by baptism in a pool. Adkins, p. 127⁹⁸

Theophilus, c. 180 A.D.

The things proceeding from the waters were blessed by God, that this also could be a sign of men being destined to receive repentance and remission for sins, through the water and bath of regeneration—as many as come to the truth and are born again. *Theophilus (c. 180, E), 2.101.*

Irenaeus of Lyons, c. 130-200 A.D.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 259.

Irenaeus, the overseer of Lyons, was one of the most respected disciples and church leaders of the second century. He was eventually killed for his faith. When he was a boy, Irenaeus heard Polycarp teach. Irenaeus writes clearly and authoritatively as a writer who had listened to those who knew the apostles personally.

When we come to refute them [the Gnostics], we will show in its proper place that this class of men have been instigated by Satan to a denial of that baptism which is regeneration to God. Thus, they have renounced the whole faith.... For the baptism institute by the visible Jesus was for the remission of sins. *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.346.*

But there are some of them [Gnostics] who assert that it is unnecessary to bring persons to the water. Rather, they mix oil and water together, and they play this mixture on the heads of those who are to be initiated.... This they maintain to be the redemption.... Other [heretics], however, reject all these practices and maintain that the mystery of the unspeakable and invisible power should not to be performed by visible and corruptible creatures.... These claim that the knowledge of the unspeakable Greatness is itself perfect redemption. *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.346.*

When [do we bear] the image of the heavenly? Doubtless when he says, "You have been washed," believing in the name of the Lord, and receiving His Spirit. *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.537.*

Man, with respect to that formation which was after Adam, having fallen into transgression, needed the bath of regeneration. Therefore, the Lord said to [the blind man] after He had smeared his eyes with the clay, "Go to Siloam and wash." By this means, He restored to him both confirmation and regeneration that takes place by means of the bath. *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.543.*

[Scripture] says, “And he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan.” It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized. Rather, this was a symbol for us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord. We are spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, just as the Lord has declared: “Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.574.*

He came to save all persons by means of Himself—all, I say, who through Him are born again to God—infants, children, boys, youth, and old men. *Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.391.*

Clement of Alexandria, c. 150-215 A.D.

Clement of Alexandria was a learned teacher in Egypt who was in charge of a catechetical school. Origen was one of his pupils. Clement left a wonderful book entitled *Christ the Educator* around 180 A.D. which has numerous references to baptism. He notes that baptism had a number of synonyms in the church at that time. One of these synonyms of baptism was based on the Greek word “photizo”—to be enlightened or to come into the light.

Being baptized, we are illuminated. Illuminated, we become sons.... This work is variously called grace, illumination, perfection, and washing. Washing, by which we cleanse away our sins. Grace, by which the penalties accruing to transgressions are remitted. Illumination, by which that holy light of salvation is beheld, that is, by which we see God clearly. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.*

If He was perfect, why was He, the perfect one, baptized? It was necessary, they say, to fulfill the profession that pertained to humanity. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.*

Straightway, on our regeneration, we attained that perfection after which we aspired. For we were illuminated which is to know God. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.*

And he who has just been regenerated—as the name necessarily indicates—and has been enlightened, is immediately delivered from darkness, and instantly receives the light.... Thus also, we who are baptized, having wiped off the sins that obscure the light of the Divine Spirit, have the eye of the spirit free, unimpeded, and full of light, by which alone we contemplate the Divine, the Holy Spirit flowing down to us from above. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.216.*

Our transgressions were taken away by one Paeonian medicine, the baptism of the Word. We are washed from all our sins, and are no longer entangled in evil. This is the one grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.216, 217.*

He adds, “For so will you pass through the water of another,” reckoning heretical baptism not proper and true water. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.322.*

In the same way, therefore, we also repent of our sins, renounce our iniquities, and are purified by baptism. Thereby, we speed back to the eternal light as children of the Father. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.217.*

The union of the Logos with baptism is like the agreement of milk with water. For, of all liquids, milk alone receives water. It allows itself to be mixed with water for the purpose of cleansing—just as baptism does for the remission of sins. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.222.*

John prophesied up until the baptism of salvation. *Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.331.*

This is what was said, “unless you are converted and become as children” [Matt. 28:3]. That is, unless you become pure in flesh and holy in soul by refraining from evil deeds. This shows that He would have us to be such, as also He generated us from our mother—the water. *Clement of Alexandria* (c. 195, E), 2.439.

The three days may represent the mystery of the seal [i.e., baptism], in which God is really believed. *Clement of Alexandria* (c. 195, E), 2.462.

The sins committed before faith are accordingly forgiven by the Lord—not that they may be undone, but as if they had not been done. *Clement of Alexandria* (c. 195, E), 2.437.

Tertullian of Carthage, c. 160-230 A.D.

Tertullian was another leader who commanded great respect and wrote many works in Latin. He defended the Christian faith to the Roman senate. David Berçot writes about him: “Tertullian was born around A.D. 150 in the city of Carthage in North Africa. Both of his parents were pagan, and his father was a centurion. Tertullian received a thorough education in the knowledge of the Romans and the Greeks, and he apparently practiced law before his conversion. His writings indicate that he did not become a Christian until he was in his thirties or forties...he used his vast learning in the cause of Christ. At the risk of his life, he wrote several works to the Romans, defending Christianity and attempting to persuade the authorities to halt their senseless persecution. Tertullian apparently served as an elder or presbyter in Carthage...The most famous of his newly coined terms was the word ‘Trinity’...Tertullian’s style was to attack, rather than to gently persuade.”⁹⁹ Around 211, he seems to have left the church and joined the Montanist sect which differed primarily in the matters of discipline and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁹⁹ Tertullian, *Glimpse at Early Christian Church Life* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1991), 2-3.

We were drawn out from the calamities of this world in which we were tarrying, perishing with thirst. We were revived by "drinking"...of the baptismal water. *Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.170.*

I will turn to that highest authority of our "seal" itself. When entering the water, we make profession of the Christian faith in the words of its rule. We then bear public testimony that we have renounced the devil, his pomp, angels. *Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.81.*

Do we not renounce and rescind that baptismal pledge, when we cease to bear its testimony? *Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.89.*

With great simplicity, without pomp, without any considerable novelty of preparation, and without expense, a man is dipped in water. Amid the utterance of some few words, he is moistened, and then rises again, not much the [physically] cleaner. Because of that, the consequent attainment of eternity is esteemed the more incredible. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.669.*

Heretics, however, have no fellowship in our discipline.... I am not bound to recognize in them a thing that is commanded to me, because they do not have the same God as we do. Nor do they have the same Christ. Therefore, their baptism is not one with ours, either, for it is not the same. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.676.*

It makes no difference whether a man is washed in a sea or a pool, a stream or a fountain, a lake or a trough.... All waters...attain the sacramental power of sanctification. For the Spirit immediately supervenes from the heavens and rests over the waters, sanctifying them through Himself. And being thus sanctified, they acquire at the same time the power of sanctifying. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.670,671.*

When we have come from the font, we are thoroughly anointed with a blessed unction [i.e., oil]. This practice comes from the old discipline, where on entering the priesthood, men used to be anointed with oil from a horn.... In our case, the oil runs physically, but it profits us spiritually. It is similar to the act of baptism itself, which is also physical—in that we are plunged in water. Yet, its effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins.... Next, the hand is laid on us, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through a benediction.... This is derived from the old sacramental rite in which Jacob blessed his grandsons who were born of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh—with his hands laid on them and crossed.... Then that most Holy Spirit willingly descends from the Father over our cleansed and blessed bodies. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.672, 673.*

Those who are about to enter baptism should pray with repeated prayers, fasts, and bendings of the knee—with all-night vigils and with the confession of all past sins. This way they may express the meaning even of the baptism of John. The Scripture says, “They were baptized, confessing their own sins.” *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.678, 679.*

Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life.... We, like little fishes, after the example of our ichthus, Jesus Christ, are born in water. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.669.*

And so, according to the circumstances, disposition, and even the age of each individual, the delay of baptism is preferable. This is particularly true in the case of little children. For why is it necessary—if baptism itself is not so necessary—that the sponsors likewise should be thrust into danger?... Let the children come, then, while they are growing up. Let them come while they are learning—while they are learning where to come. Let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ. Why does the innocent period of life hasten to the remission of sins?... If anyone understands the weighty importance of

baptism, he will fear its reception more than its delay. Sound faith is secure of salvation. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.678.*

Oh, miserable unbelief that denies to God His own properties, simplicity, and power! What then? Is it not wonderful, too, that death should be washed away by washing? *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.669.*

We nevertheless proceed to address this question, "How foolish and impossible it is to be formed anew by water! Pray tell, in what respect has this material substance merited a position of such high dignity?"... [Tertullian's Answer:] Water was the first to produce life, so that it would be no wonder in baptism if waters know how to give life. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.670.*

Therefore, after the waters have been (in a manner) endowed with medicinal virtue through the intervention of the angel, the spirit is physically washed in the waters, and the flesh is spiritually cleansed in the same water. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.671.*

[The waters] that used to remedy bodily defects, now heal the spirit. The waters that used to bring temporal health, now renew eternal health. The waters that set free but once in the year, now daily save people en masse, death being done away through washing of sin. Once the guilt is removed, the penalty is, of course, removed as well.... It is not that in the waters we obtain the Holy Spirit. Rather, in the water under the angel, we are cleansed and prepared for the Holy Spirit.... Thus, too, does the angel, the witness of baptism, "make the paths straight" for the Holy Spirit. For he is about to come upon us. The "paths are made straight" by the washing away of sins, which faith obtains, sealed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.672.*

Now, the teaching is laid down that “without baptism, salvation is attainable by no one.” This is based primarily on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, “Unless one is born of water he has not life.” However, when this is laid down, there immediately arise scrupulous (or rather, audacious) doubts on the part of some. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.674, 675.*

“Unless a man has been born again of water and Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” These words have tied faith to the necessity of baptism. Accordingly, all thereafter who became believers were baptized. So it was, too, that Paul, when he believed, was baptized. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.676.*

We, then, enter the font once. Our sins are washed away once, for they should never be repeated. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.676.*

Know that baptism is not rashly to be administered.... “Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine.” *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.678.*

Easter [Gr. *pascha*] provides a more than usually solemn day for baptism—when the Lord’s passion, in which we are baptized, was completed. Nor will it be incongruous to interpret figuratively the fact that, when the Lord was about to celebrate the last Passover, He said to the disciples who were sent to make preparation, “You will meet a man bearing water.”...After that, Pentecost is a most joyous time for conferring baptisms.... However, every day is the Lord’s. Every hour, every time, is appropriate for baptism. If there is a difference in the solemnity, there is no distinction in the grace. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.678.*

Therefore, blessed ones, whom the grace of God awaits, when you ascend from that most sacred bath of your new birth and spread your hands for the first time in the house of your mother, together with your brethren, ask from the Father, ask from the Lord, that His own specialties

of grace and distributions of gifts may be supplied to you. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.679.*

Let not the fact that Jesus Himself did not baptize trouble anyone. For into what would He have baptized? Into repentance/ of what use, then, was His forerunner? Into remission of sins? But he gave this by a word. Into Himself, whom by humility He was concealing? Into the Holy Spirit, who had not yet descended from the Father? Into the church, which His apostles had not yet founded? *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.674.*

Of giving [baptism], the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right. In the next place, the presbyters and deacons—yet, not without the bishop’s authority, on account of the honor of the church. For when it is preserved, peace is preserved. In addition to these, laymen have the right. For what is equally received can be equally given. So, unless bishops, presbyters, or deacons are present at that location, other disciples are called to the work.... But how much more is the rule of reverence and modesty necessary to laymen—seeing that their powers belong to their superiors.... The most holy apostle has said, “all things are lawful, but not all expedient.” *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.677.*

But the woman of audacity, who has usurped the power to teach, will surely not give birth for herself likewise to a right of baptizing! *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.677.*

The Jewish Israel bathes daily, because it is daily being defiled. *Tertullian (c. 198, W), 3.676.*

From our sacrament itself, we should draw our interpretation that practices of that kind are opposed to the faith. For how have we renounced the devil and his angels, if we make [idols to] them? *Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.64.*

I do not deny that the divine benefit (that is, the putting away of sins) is in every way certain to those who are about to enter the [baptismal] water. But what we have to labor for is, that it may be granted us to attain that blessing. For who will grant to you—a man of such faithless repentance—one single sprinkling of any water whatever?... However, some think that God is under a necessity of bestowing what He has promised [to give] even on the unworthy. So they turn his liberality into His slavery!... For do not many afterwards fall out of [grace]? Is not this gift taken away from many? *Tertullian (c. 203, W), 3.661*

This baptismal washing is a sealing of faith, which faith is begun and is commended by the faith of repentance. We are not washed in order that we may cease sinning, but because we have *ceased*, since in heart we have been bathed already. For the first baptism of a hearer is this: a perfect fear.... If it is only after the baptismal waters that we cease sinning, it is out of necessity, not of free will. *Tertullian (c. 203, W), 3.662.*

Marcion washes a man who had never been defiled so far as [his God] was concerned. And into the sacrament of salvation, he wholly plunges that flesh which is beyond the pale of salvation [according to him]! *Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.293.*

According to Marcion, the flesh is not immersed in the water of the sacrament, unless it is in the state of virginity, widowhood, or celibacy. *Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.293.*

I see no coherence and consistency [in Marcion]. No, not even in the very sacrament of his faith! For what end does baptism serve, according to him? If it is the remission of sins, how will he demonstrate that he remits sins, when [his God] afford no evidence that He retains them?... Marcion therefore seals a man who had never been unsealed in respect of [his God]. He washes a man who had never been defiled so far as [his God] was concerned. And

into the sacrament of salvation, he wholly plunges that flesh which is beyond the pale of salvation [according to Marcion]! No farmer will irrigate ground that will yield him no fruit in return—unless he is as silly as Marcion's God! *Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.293.*

The cleansing of the Syrian [i.e., Naaman] rather portrayed to the nations of the world their own cleansing in Christ their Light.... For the virtue and fullness of the one baptism was thus solemnly imputed to Christ. For He alone was one day to establish on earth—not only revelation—but also a baptism endowed with bountiful power. *Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.356.*

Now the covenant you have made respecting [the devil] is to renounce him, his pomp, and his angels. Such is your agreement in this matter. Now...you must never think of getting back any of the things that you have renounced and have given back to him. Otherwise, he may summon you before God the Judge as a fraudulent man, and a transgressor of your agreement. *Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.216.*

“Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”—in other words, he cannot be holy. Every soul, then, by reason of its birth, has its nature in Adam until it is born again in Christ. Moreover, it is unclean all the time that it remains without this regeneration. And because it is unclean, it is actively sinful. *Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.220.*

When we are going to enter the water, but a littler before—in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president—we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, his pomp and his angels. Upon that, we are immersed [Latin: *mergo*, to dip, to immerse] three times, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel. Then, when we are taken up, we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey. Then, from that day, we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week.

[The practice of parting of milk and honey and refraining from bathing were apparently a local custom, as no other writers make mention of this practice.] *Tertullian* (c. 211, *W*), 3.94.

He commands them to baptize into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—not into a unipersonal God. And, indeed, it is not once only—but three times—that we are immersed into the three Persons, at the mention of each individual name. *Tertullian* (c. 213, *W*), 3.623.

The flesh is the clothing of the soul. The uncleanness, indeed, is washed away by baptism. *Tertullian* (c. 213, *W*), 3.646.

Origen, c. 185-255 A.D.

Origen was a pupil of Clement of Alexandria and wrote during the span of 202-254 A.D. Bruce Shelley in his book *Church History in Plain Language* calls Origen the most influential and sophisticated scholar that could defend the Christian claim to the Old Testament through the use of allegory. Origen taught in Alexandria and according to Berçot “always considered the exposition of Scripture his primary task. The persistent tendency of erroneous response to the gospel, whether ancient or contemporary, is to lay hold upon a few impressive texts and to wrench some rigid and erroneous interpretations from these. This Origen would not allow. He wanted the whole Bible to speak, because he knew that what the Bible taught in its entirety are the central Christian truths of catholic [universal] Christianity. Origen saved the Scriptures for the church and thus protected the historical foundation of the Christian faith.”¹⁰⁰

Matthew alone adds the words, “to repentance,” teaching us that the benefit of baptism is connected with the *intention* of the baptized person. To him who repents, it is saving. However, to him who comes to it without

¹⁰⁰ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 52, 80, 82, 85.

repentance, it will produce greater condemnation. *Origen (c. 228, E), 9.367.*

Regeneration did not take place with John [the Baptist]. However, with Jesus, through His disciples, it does occur. What is called the bath of regeneration takes place with renewal of the Spirit. For the Spirit, as well, now comes. It comes from God and is over and above the water. Yet, it does not come to all after the water. *Origen (c. 228, E), 9.367.*

“By the bath of regeneration,” they were born as newborn babes. *Origen (c. 245, E), 9.491.*

Hippolytus, c. 200 A.D.

The ropes that stretch around her [the ship of the church] are the love of Christ, which binds the church. The net that she bears with here is the bath of the regeneration that renews the believing, from which too are these glories. Just like the wind, the Spirit from heaven is present, by whom those who believe are sealed. *Hippolytus (c. 200, W), 5.217.*

Novation, c. 235 A.D.

It is the Holy Spirit who effects with water the second birth, as a certain seed of diving generation. It is a consecration of a heavenly birth and the pledge of a promised inheritance. *Novation (c. 235, W), 5.641.*

Commodianus, c. 240 A.D.

In baptism, the coarse garment of your birth is washed.... You have once been washed. Shall you be able to be immersed again? *Commodianus (c. 240, W), 4.212.*

Cyprian, c. 250 A.D.

Cyprian (bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa during fierce persecutions) wrote some impressive doctrinal and practical works. He emphasizes that there is only one baptism (as in Ephesians 4:4), as he talks about those who are baptized by splinter groups. Some of these splinter groups denied the basic doctrines of the one church. Cyprian says that these false baptisms are not baptisms at all.

By the help of the water of new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above—serene and pure—had been infused into my reconciled heart. Then, by the agency of the Spirit breathed from heaven, a second birth had restored me to a new man. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.276.*

...from that death which once the blood of Christ extinguished and from which the saving grace of baptism and of our Redeemer has delivered us. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.332.*

In respect of the case of the infants, you say that they should not be baptized within the second or third day after their birth—that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded. So you think that one who has just been born should not be baptized and sanctified with the eighth day. However, we all thought very differently in our council.... Rather, we all believe that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to anyone born of man.... As far as we can, we must strive that no should be lost, if at all possible. For what is lacking to him has once been formed in the womb by the hand of God? *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.353, 354.*

Moreover, belief in divine Scripture declares to us that among all—whether infants or those who are older—there is the same equality of the divine gift.... Otherwise, it would seem that the very grace which is given to the baptized is given either more, or less, depending on the age of the receivers. However, the Holy Spirit is not given with measure. Rather, it is given alike to all, by the love and mercy of the Father.... For although the infant is still fresh from its birth, yet it is not such that anyone should shudder at kissing it in giving grace and in making peace. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.354.*

Even to the greatest sinners and to those who have sinned much against God, when they subsequently believe, remission of sins is granted. Nobody is hindered from baptism and from grace. How much more should we shrink from hindering an infant. For he, being lately born, has not sinned—other than, in being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth. For this reason, he more easily approaches the reception of the forgiveness of sins. For to him are remitted—not his own sins—but the sins of another. Therefore, dearest brother, this was our opinion in council that no one should be hindered by us from baptism and from the grace of God. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.354.*

By baptism, the Holy Spirit is received.... The Lord speaks to the Samaritan woman, saying, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will not thirst forever.” By this, he signified the very baptism of saving water, which indeed is once received and is not again repeated.... The Lord, when He came, manifested the truth of baptism...in commanding that this faithful water—the water of life eternal—should be given to believers in baptism. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.360.*

From [baptism] springs the whole origin of faith, the saving access to the hope of life eternal and the diving condescension for purifying and quickening the servants of

God. For if anyone could be [truly] baptized by heretics, he certainly could also obtain remission of sins. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.382.*

He who has been sanctified, his sins being put away in baptism, and has been spiritually reformed into a new man, has become fitted for receiving the Holy Spirit. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.387.*

The blessed apostle sets forth and proves that baptism is that by which the old man dies and the new man is born, saying, "He saved us by the washing of regeneration." *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.388.*

One is not born by the imposition of hands when he receives the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is in baptism. Thereafter, being already born, he may receive the Holy Spirit. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.388.*

Since in baptism, every person has his own sins remitted, the Lord proves and declares in His Gospel that sins can only be put away by those who have the Holy Spirit. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.400.*

It is clear that the devil is driven out in baptism by the faith of the believer. And if that faith should fail afterwards, he returns. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.402.*

They who still are of the earth by their first birth can begin to be of heaven by being born of water and of the Spirit. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.452.*

In the bath of saving water, the fire of Gehenna is extinguished. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.476.*

In the baptism of water, there is received the remission of sins. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.497.*

The old baptism should cease and a new one should begin.... Also, according to John: "Unless a man is born of

water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.511.*

Unless a man has been baptized and born again, he cannot attain unto the kingdom of God. In the Gospel according to John: "Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." *Cyprian (c. 250, W) 5.542.*

All sins are put away in baptism. In the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: ... "And these things indeed you were. But you are washed; but you are sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.551.*

It is required, then, that the water should first be cleansed and sanctified by the priest, so that it may wash away by its baptism the sins of the man who is baptized. For the Lord says by Ezekiel the prophet: "Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be cleansed from all your filthiness."... The very question that is asked in baptism is a witness of the truth. For when we say, "Do you believe in eternal life and remission of sins through the holy church?" we are saying that remission of sins is not granted except in the church. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.376.*

There is no ground for anyone...to oppose us in the name of Christ and to say, "All who are baptized everywhere, and in any manner, in the name of Jesus Christ, have obtained the grace of baptism."... The Son alone, without the Father (or against the Father) cannot be of advantage to anybody. It is the same as with the Jews. They boasted as to their having the Father. Yet, the Father would profit them nothing unless they believed on the Son whom He had sent.... There cannot be a hope of salvation except by knowing the two together. How, when God the Father is not known—nay, is even blasphemed—can they who among the heretics are said to be baptized in the name of Christ be judged to have obtained the remission of

sins?... Christ Himself commands the pagans to be baptized in the full and united Trinity. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.383.*

Someone may object, saying that Novatian...baptizes with the same symbol with which we baptize, knows the same God and Father, the same Christ the Son, the same Holy Spirit, and that for this reason he may claim the power of baptizing—namely, that he does not seem to differ from us as to the baptismal questions. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.399.*

You have also asked, dearest son, what I thought of those who obtain God's grace in sickness and weakness. Are they to be considered legitimate Christians, for they have not been *bathed* with the saving water, but only *sprinkled*? On this point, my shyness and modesty prejudices no one. I prevent no one from feeling what he thinks right and from doing what he feels to be right. As far as my limited understanding conceives it, I think that the divine benefits can in no respect be mutilated and weakened. Nothing less can occur in that case where, with full and entire faith both of the giver and the receiver, what is drawn from the divine gift is accepted.... In the sacraments of salvation, when necessity compels, and God bestows his mercy, the divine methods confer the whole benefit on believers. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.400, 401.*

When we were together in council, dearest brethren, we read your letter that you wrote to us concerning those who seem to be baptized by heretics and schismatics, asking whether—when they come to the catholic church, which is one—they should be baptized.... We put forward our opinion, but not as a new one. Rather, we join with you in equal agreement in an opinion long since decreed by our predecessors and observed by us. This opinion is namely...that no one can be baptized outside the church, for there is one baptism appointed in the holy church.... How can the person who baptizes give remission of sins to another when he himself—being outside the church—cannot put away his own sins? *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.375, 376.*

I know not by what presumption some of our colleagues are led to think that those who have been dipped by heretics should not be baptized when they come to us. The reason they give is that there is "one baptism."... He who of his own authority grants this advantage to the heretics yields and consents to them that the enemies and adversaries of Christ have the power of washing, purifying, and sanctifying a man. However, *we* say that those who come from them are not *re-baptized* by us, but are *baptized*. For, indeed, they did not receive anything there, where there is nothing. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.377.*

Christ Himself commands the pagan to be baptized in the full and untied Trinity. Are we to believe that someone who denies Christ is denied by Christ, but that he who denies he Father...is not denied? Are we to believe that he who blasphemes against Him whom Christ called His Lord and His God is rewarded by Christ? Are we to believe he obtains remission of sins and the sanctification of baptism? *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.383, 384.*

Someone might say, "What, then, becomes of those who were received from heresy into the church without baptism, in times past?" The Lord is able by His mercy to make allowances and not to separate from the gifts of His church those who through ignorance were admitted into the church and have since fallen asleep [in death] in the church. However, just because there was error at one time, it does not mean that there must always be error. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.385.*

On the reading of [the letter from Stephen, the bishop of Rome], you will more and more observe his error in endeavoring to maintain the cause of heretics against Christians.... For he judged the baptism of all heretics to be just and lawful.... If, therefore, it is either commanded in the Gospel, or contained in the Epistles or Acts of the apostles, that those who come from any heresy should not be baptized, but only have hands laid upon them to

repentance, let this divine and holy tradition be observed. But if everywhere heretics are called nothing else than adversaries and antichrists,...no one should defame the apostles as if they had approved of the baptisms of heretics. *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.386.*

It is practiced and held by us that all who are converted from any heresy whatever to the church must be baptized by the only and lawful baptism of the church—with the exception of those who had previously been baptized in the church (and from there had passed over to the heretics). *Cyprian (c. 250, W), 5.389, 390.*

Firmilian, c. 256 A.D.

Just as a heretic may not lawfully ordain or lay on hands, so neither may he baptize.... What kind of thing is it that when we see that Paul, after John's baptism, baptized those disciples again, we are hesitating to baptize those who come to the church from heresy, after their unhallowed and profane dipping. *Firmilian (c. 256, E), 5.392.*

Who in the church is perfect and wise and can either defend or believe that the bare invocation of names [of the Trinity] is sufficient for the remission of sins and the sanctification of baptism? For these things are only of advantage when he who baptizes has the Holy Spirit. *Firmilian (c. 256, E), 5.392.*

If the baptism of heretics can have the regeneration of the second birth, those who are baptized among them must be considered to be children of God—not heretics. For the second birth, which occurs in baptism, begets sons of God. *Firmilian (c. 256, E), 5.393.*

[Stephen, bishop of Rome] says, "the name of Christ is of great advantage to faith and the sanctification of baptism. So whoever is anywhere baptized in the name of Christ, he immediately obtains the grace of Christ"... However, we

join custom to truth. And we resist the Romans' customer with custom—the customer of truth.... It has always been observed here that we knew none but the one church of God. And we have deemed no baptism holy except that of the holy church. *Firmilian (c. 256, E), 5.395.*

The second birth, which occurs in baptism, begets sons of God. *Firmilian (c. 256, E), 5.393.*

Various Councils, c. 256-260 A.D.

Cyprian said: "We have determined over and over again that heretics who come to the church must be baptized and sanctified by the baptism of the church." *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.565.*

Primus of Misgirpa said: "I decide that every man who comes to us from heresy must be baptized. For in vain does he think that he has been baptized there.... Whatever is done outside the church has no effect towards salvation." *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.566.*

Crescens of Cirta said: "I judge that all heretics and schismatics who wish to come to the catholic church will not be allowed to enter without their having first been exorcised and baptized." *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.567.*

Pomponius of Dionysiana said: "It is evident that heretics cannot baptize and give remission of sins, seeing that they do not have power to be able to bind or loose anything on earth." *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.570.*

A divine and sacred provincial synod, gathered together at Rome by Stephen, the blessed martyr and father, excommunicated those who (in an African synod) had without reason concluded that those who came to the

catholic church from any heresy should be re-baptized. *Roman council of Stephen (c. 256, W), 5.653.*

Those who are called antichrists cannot administer the grace of saving baptism.... Water sanctified in the church by the prayer of the priest washes away sins.... By the regeneration of baptism, they may then come to the promise of Christ.... Sins are not remitted except in the baptism of the church.... If there is anyone who says that the grace of baptism is with heretics, he must first show and prove that the church is among them. *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.567.*

Nemesianus of Thubane said: "The baptism that heretics and schismatics bestow is not the true one.... In the Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ spoke with His divine voice, saying, "Unless a man is born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." ... Therefore, unless they receive saving baptism in the catholic church, which is one, they cannot be saved. Rather, they will be condemned with the carnal in the Judgment of the Lord Christ. *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.566.*

Munnulus of Girba said: "Brethren, the truth of our mother, the catholic church, has always remained and still remains with us—especially in the Trinity of baptism." *Seventh Council of Carthage (c. 256, W), 5.567.*

...immediately they have descended into the water. *Treatise on Re-Baptism (c.257, W), 5.676.*

Our salvation is founded in the baptism of the Spirit, which for the most part is associated with the baptism of water. *Treatise on Re-Baptism (c. 257, W), 5.673.*

Thus, cleaving to the baptism of men, the Holy Spirit either goes before or follows it. Or failing the baptism of water, it falls upon those who believe. *Treatise on Re-Baptism (c. 257, W), 5.676.*

According to the most ancient custom and ecclesiastical tradition, it would suffice that—after that baptism that they have received outside [the church] indeed, but still in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—that only hands should be laid upon them by the bishop for their reception of the Holy Spirit. And this imposition of hands affords them the renewed and perfected seal of faith. *Treatise on Re-Baptism* (c. 257, W) 5.667.

Not without reason, we also in the present day may believe that men who are amended from their former error may be baptized in the Holy Spirit, who, although they were baptized with water in the name of the Lord, might had a faith somewhat imperfect. *Treatise on Re-Baptism* (c. 257, W), 5.671.

As far as concerns the disciples themselves [prior to Pentecost], they are found to have had a faith that was neither sound nor perfect—as to the matters we have referred to. And what is much more serious, they baptized others, as it is written in the Gospel according to John. Besides, what will you say of those who are in many cases baptized by bishops of very bad character, who...are deprived of their office itself, or barred from communion? Or what will you say of those who may have been baptized by bishops whose opinions are unsound, or who are very ignorant? *Treatise on Re-Baptism* (c. 257, W), 5.673.

Outside the church, there is no Holy Spirit. Therefore, sound faith cannot exist—not just among heretics, but even among those who are established in schism. For that reason those who repent and are amended by the doctrine of the truth...should be aided only by spiritual baptism—that is, by the imposition of the bishop's hands. *Treatise on Re-Baptism* (c. 257, W), 5.673.

What will you determine against the person who hears the Word...and has at once confessed and then been martyred before there was an opportunity for him to be

baptized with water?... If you say that he has [eternally] perished, you will be opposed by the statement of the Lord, who says, "Whoever will confess me before men, I will confess him also before my Father who is in heaven."... All of this is not meant to be taken too liberally—as if it could be stretched to such a point that any heretic whatever can confess the name of Christ even though he denies Christ Himself. Nor does it apply to the person who believes on another Christ. *Treatise on Re-Batpism (c. 257, W), 5.673.*

Heretics who are already baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ must only be baptized with the Holy Spirit.... This is so even though, if they continue as the are, they cannot be saved, for they have not sought the Lord after the invocation of His name upon them. *Treatise on Re-Baptism (c. 257, W), 5.674*

In the most considerable councils of the bishops, I hear it has been decreed that those who come from heresy should first be trained in [orthodox] doctrine and then should be cleaned by baptism. *Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 262, E), 6.102.*

Methodius, c. 290 A.D.

Christ willingly suffered death for her, that He might present the church to Himself glorious and blameless—having cleansed her by the bath.... For in this way, too, the command, "Be fruitful and multiply," is duly fulfilled.... For in no other way could the church conceived believers and give them the new birth through the bath of regeneration, except by Christ emptying Himself for their sake, so that He might be contained by them. *Methodius (c. 290, E), 6.319, 320.*

Those who are born again by the bath receive... of His holiness and of His glory.... The illuminated receive the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, and they are appropriately born again to incorruption. *Methodius (c. 290, E), 6.320.*

This denotes the faith of those who are cleansed from corruption in the bath [i.e., baptism]. *Methodius (c. 290, E), 6.336.*

Otherwise, we would not do wrong after baptism, for we would be entirely and absolutely free from sin. However, even after believing and after the time of being touched by the water of sanctification, we are oftentimes found in sin. *Methodius (c. 290, E), 6.365.*

Cyril of Jerusalem, c. 350 A.D.

Cyril of Jerusalem gave a series of lectures which were recorded by someone in shorthand and later transcribed. These lectures gave instructions to those studying the Bible with the intent of joining the church. Such a lecture series was termed a “catechesis,” from a Greek word meaning to be an auditor, or hearer, of the Word. The term survives today in the modern catechism of the Catholic church. This is done before the confirmation of church members who may have been baptized as infants. However, in the fourth century, completion of this type of *first principles* lecture series was a necessary prerequisite for anyone to be baptized, and thus only adults could be admitted. He writes, with explicit reference to John 3:5:

For since man’s nature is twofold, compounded of soul and body, the purification is also twofold, spiritual for the spiritual part, and physical for the body. For as the water purifies the body, so the Spirit seals the soul, that having our hearts sprinkled, and our bodies washed with clean water, we may draw near to God. Therefore, when about to enter the water, regard it not as mere water, but look for its saving power by the action of the Holy Spirit, for without both you cannot be made perfect.

It is not I who say this, but the Lord Jesus, who has the power in this matter, says: “Unless a man be born again, of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Neither does he who is baptized, but has not been deemed worthy of the Spirit, possess perfect grace; nor will

a man who acts virtuously, but does not receive the seal by water, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Therefore, prepare the vessel of your soul, that you may become a son of God, and joint heir, indeed, of God, and joint heir with Christ. That is, if you are preparing actually to receive; if in faith you are coming forward to be established in faith; if with clear purpose you are putting off the old man. For all your sins will be forgiven, whether sexual immorality or adultery or any other ungodliness.

What sin could be greater than crucifying Christ? But baptism can forgive even this, as Peter told the three thousand who had crucified Christ, when they came to him and asked him, saying, "Brothers, what shall we do?" For great is our wound. You advised us of our fall, O Peter, when you said: "the author of life you killed." What medicine is there for so great a wound? What purification for such foulness? What salvation for such ungodliness? "Repent," he says, "and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." O the depth of the love of God! They despair of salvation but are yet found worthy by the Holy Spirit. There you see the power of baptism...

Catechesis III: On Baptism (4-7)

Apostolic Constitutions, compiled c. 390 A.D.

When they wish to repent, we receive the pagans into the church to hear the Word. However, we do not admit them to communion until they have received the seal of baptism and are made complete Christians. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.414.*

He who out of contempt will not be baptized will be condemned as an unbeliever. He will be reproached as ungrateful and foolish. For the Lord says, "Unless a man is

baptized of water and of the Spirit, he will by no means enter into the kingdom of heaven." And again: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned." However, he may say, "When I am dying, I will be baptized, lest I should afterwards sin and defile my baptism." Such a person is ignorant of God, and he forgets his own mortal nature. For it is written, "Do not delay to turn unto the Lord, for you do not know what the next day will bring forth." *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.457; see also 3.580; extended discussion: 3.669-3.679.*

[The bishop]...will anoint the head of those who are to be baptized (whether they are men or women) with the holy oil, as a representation of the spiritual baptism. After that, either you, the bishop, or a presbyter that is under you, will in the solemn form pronounce over them the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and will dip them in the water. And let a deacon receive the man and a deaconess the woman.... After that, let the bishop anoint with ointment those who are baptized. *Apostolic constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.431.*

You should anoint the person beforehand with the holy oil and then baptize him with the water. Finally, you should seal him with the ointment. This is so that the anointing with oil may be the participation of the Holy Spirit, that the water may be the symbol of death, and that the ointment may be the seal of the covenants. However, if there is neither oil nor ointment, water is sufficient both for the anointing and for the seal, as well as for the confession of Him who is dead, or in fact is dying together [with Christ]. However, before baptism, let the candidate fast. For even the Lord, when He was first baptized by John and lived in the wilderness, afterward fasted forty days and forty nights. Now, He fasted *after* baptism, because He Himself had no need of cleansing, fasting, or purgation. For He was by nature pure and holy.... But he who is to be initiated into

His death should first fast, and then be baptized. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.469.*

When the catechumen is to be baptized, let him learn what is involved in the renunciation of the devil and the joinder of himself to Christ. For it is appropriate that he should first abstain from things contrary and then be admitted to the mysteries. He must beforehand purify his heart from all wickedness.... For even our Lord exhorted us in this manner, saying first, "make disciples of all nations." But then he adds: "and baptized them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Therefore, let the candidate for baptism declare his renunciation in this manner: "I renounce Satan, his works, his pomps, his worship, his angels, his falsehoods, and all things that are under him." And after his renunciation, let him make his public association, saying: "I associate myself to Christ and believe, and am baptized into one Unbegotten Being, the only true God Almighty..." [here follows the creed].

And after this vow, he comes next to the anointing with oil. Now, this is blessed by the high priest [i.e., bishop] for the remission of sins. It is the first preparation for baptism. For he calls upon the Unbegotten God, the Father of Christ,...that He will sanctify the oil in the name of the Lord Jesus and impart to it spiritual grace and efficacious strength.... After this, he comes to the water and blesses and glorifies the Lord God Almighty.... After this, let him stand up and pray the prayer that the Lord taught us. Of necessity, he who is risen again should stand up and pray, for he that has been raised up stands upright. Therefore, let him who has been dead with Christ, and is raised up with Him, stand up. But let him pray towards the east. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.477.*

If any bishop or presbyter does not perform the three immersions of the one initiation—but performs only one immersion into the death of Christ—let him be deprived. For the Lord did not say, "Baptize into my death." Rather, He said, "God and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Therefore, O bishops, baptize three times into one Father and Son, and Holy Spirit, according to the will of Christ. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.503.*

Baptize your infants also and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of God. For He says, "Allow the little children to come unto me and do not forbid them." *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.457.*

[The bishop] has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.410.*

[The bishops are] the ambassadors of God, who have regenerated you by water and endowed you with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.412.*

[The bishop]... will anoint the head of those who are to be baptized (whether they are men or women) with the holy oil, as a representation of the spiritual baptism. After that, either you, the bishop or a presbyter that is under you, will in the solemn form pronounce over them the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and will dip them in the water. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.431.*

Those who have been baptized by heretics are not initiated. Rather, they are polluted. They do not received the remission of sins—but the bond of impiety. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.456.*

If a bishop or presbyter rebaptized someone who has had true baptism—or does not baptize one who has been polluted by the ungodly [baptism]—let him be deprived. *Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390, E), 7.503; extended discussion 5.375-5.402, 5.565-5.572.*

Even the Jewish nation had wicked heresies.... The Hemerobaptists do not eat unless daily they wash. And

unless they cleanse their bed, tables, platters, cups, and seats, they do not use any of those things. *Apostolic Constitutions* (compiled c. 390, E), 7.452.

Do not seek after Jewish separations or perpetual washings. *Apostolic Constitutions* (compiled c. 390, E), 7.464.

Conclusions of the Early Christians' Convictions on Baptism

Even in the Creed of the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, conversion was still shown to be “one baptism for the remission of sins.” It should be clear from the writings of the early Christians that they regarded John 3:5 as explicitly referring to water baptism. To the primitive church, baptism was considered to be the moment of regeneration, and thus the use of water in conversion. In no early church literature does one find the interpretation of John 3:3-5 as being physical birth. “Water and the Spirit” is always interpreted as spiritual rebirth.

In *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* David Berçot writes: “Since this washing was completely independent of any merit on the baptized person’s part, baptism was frequently referred to as ‘grace.’ I was surprised to find that the early Christians used the term ‘grace’ to refer to a specific act such as baptism.”¹⁰¹

It is also evident that these early Christian writers considered water baptism to be the moment when the candidate was “sealed” with the Holy Spirit, which contradicts some modern views. One of the modern views proposes a separate “baptism of the Spirit” for individuals. On the other hand, the early Christians took Peter’s statement in Acts 2:38 (as quoted above by Cyril) to be the literal fulfillment of Jesus’ words in John 3:5, the water and the Spirit. Paul also says in Titus 3:5: “He saved us by the washing of rebirth, and renewal by the Holy Spirit...” The early church regarded those who taught that baptism was not the beginning of salvation as false teachers and put them in the category of the Gnostics who taught that

¹⁰¹ David Berçot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?* (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing, 1989), 78.

humans cannot be reborn or regenerated by God at the point of water baptism.

It should be evident from these writings that the early Christians viewed baptism with utmost importance. However, as time went on, one can see the development of false doctrines and unbiblical extensions to the original conversion doctrine beginning to take place.

Baptism was taken far more seriously by the primitive church than it is by many churches today. The question each person needs to ask is do churches and individuals today take baptism as seriously as did the early followers of Jesus? Each person will stand before God and give an account of his life and his doctrine (1 Timothy 4:16). Jesus' words will judge each person so we must make sure that one's convictions are the same as the New Testament.

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