

**Discovering  
The Blessings  
Of Obedience  
To The Gospel**



**The Gospel  
Covenant**

**DICKSON**

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# The Gospel Covenant

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, God has established relationships with man through covenants. He has worked through covenants for the purpose of providing for us a guarantee that He will fulfill His promises to those who come to Him through obedient faith. However, since He is the one who fulfills the promises that are included in His covenant relationship with man, it is His privilege alone to determine the conditions upon which His covenants are established. It is His choice to determine the conditions by which the covenant is to be maintained. It is our responsibility to take the initiative through obedient faith to accept God's covenants, and subsequently, to maintain the covenant by obediently conforming to God's conditions.

- **Baptism and covenant relationships:** When we submit to a covenant relationship with God, eternal blessings are the result. It is the responsibility of all men, therefore, to seek to establish a covenant relationship with God who will bring into eternity only those who have established a covenant with Him according to His conditions. The new covenant that God now offers to all men is established with God at the time of the new birth when one is born of the water and the Spirit by obedience to the gospel. The promise that comes with this covenant is an opportunity to dwell with God in His presence for eternity.

Establishing a covenant with God is based on the foundation of a profound need of every individual on earth. That need is deliverance from sin that separates us from our God. Since the fall of Adam, sin has separated us from our Creator. We all live with the curse of spiritual death that is brought on by our own sins. *“Therefore, as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death passed to all men because all sinned”* (Rm 5:12).

- **Baptism and spiritual death:** Spiritual death followed sin because sin and separation from God always come together. Isaiah proclaimed, *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God”* (Is 59:2). When one is separated from God, he or she is eternally lost,

eternally doomed to live hopelessly in a world that is headed for destruction. Because of our separation from God, it is incumbent on all people to seek reconciliation with God. All of us must be reconciled to God if we would enjoy the promised blessing of the covenant that God would establish with us.

Before the sin of Adam, God predetermined a plan of reconciliation. He knew that His creation was subject to his own fallibility. After He had created people with the gift of free-moral choice, God knew that sooner or later we would rebel against His will. The rebellion came sooner than later, and thus, the eternal plan of redemption was activated.

- **Reconciliation in prophecy:** The fallibility of Adam and Eve resulted in sin. Sin resulted in their separation from their Creator. As a result of separation from God, spiritual death and eternal doom came into the lives of both Adam and Eve. The fall of Adam subsequently activated the need for reconciliation. Before the creation of the world, therefore, God had planned the way of reconciliation because He knew that sin would enter into the world.

God's plan for reconciliation was first announced to Adam and Eve in the following words:

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; **He will bruise your head, and you will bruise His heel**"*  
(Gn 3:15).

At the time of pronouncement, this prophecy of the coming saving Seed of the world was vague, though Adam and Eve knew that God would do something to rectify the sin problem they had introduced into the world.

Throughout the generations of man following Adam, and before the cross of the Seed, indications of reconciliation were sprinkled throughout God's revelations to the prophets. Prophets were inspired to prophesy of the Seed to come. However, they did not understand the significance of the prophecies. Because they did not understand the

God-planned gospel to come, Peter wrote of the prophets' anxiety when they prophesied of that which was coming:

*Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit ... did signify when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ” (1 Pt 1:10,11).*

The prophets knew that all men were dead in sin, and could not through perfect law-keeping, save themselves from condemnation. They knew that through good works no sanctification could be accomplished for sin that was against God. They assumed, therefore, that God had something to come that would remedy man's problem of sin and separation.

•**The first gospel announcement:** But eventually the greatest announcement of all time was made to some shepherds of Israel over two thousand years ago. This was the first announcement on earth of the gospel (good news) of the arrival of the incarnate Son of God:

*Do not fear, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be to all people. For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10,11).*

When this Savior of the world entered into His earthly ministry thirty years later after the preceding announcement, John proclaimed, “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).* The incarnate Son of God, the Savior of the world, had now set out to accomplish the long awaited gospel plan of redemption to reconcile to God repentant people of faith.

The Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to go to the cross for our sins, which sacrifice would accomplish our reconciliation. He “*bore our sins in His own body on the tree, so that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness” (1 Pt 2:24).* The Father “*made Him who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Co 5:21).* Atonement, justification, reconciliation, redemption, and thus, salvation, were

all made possible at the cross by the suffering Servant of God. This was the gospel of our reconciliation to which all must connect if they would reconcile themselves with their Creator.

• **The only way to life:** Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me”* (Jn 14:6). Peter reaffirmed, *“There is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (At 4:12). Jesus is the medium through whom repentant believers can be saved from sin. He is the solution to man’s greatest problem which is the problem of sin. Jesus is the only escape from the eternal destruction that awaits those who have not been reconciled to God.

All those questions that we should ask in reference to our salvation can be answered in Christ. If one has any questions concerning eternal life, then the answers to these questions must be answered by the gospel of the incarnate Son of God who gave of Himself in order that we might have a passage through Him into heaven.

This brings us to the subject of the discussion of this book. From John the Baptist to Jesus, and from Jesus to this day, an obedient response to the gospel of the grace of God is the doorway into eternal life. And when we speak of obedience to the gospel, we must speak of the action of baptism.

• **Baptism and meritorious works:** The word “baptism” is mentioned over one hundred times in our English New Testaments. The action of baptism in water is specifically mentioned in case after case in the conversions recorded in the New Testament. With such great emphasis on baptism (immersion), any serious student of God’s word would conclude that there is something very significant about the action of baptism in relation to one’s salvation. That significance is the subject of this book, for it is our belief that baptism is inseparably linked to one’s salvation. God established it as such. And because He did, the alien sinner must follow through with obedience to what God has commanded us to do in response to the gospel of His Son.

It is not that baptism is some meritorious work or a church sacra-



ment. It is simply that God has made baptism a response of faith in Jesus and a point of reference at which He washes away our sins. It is a point of reference to which the obedient believer can always look back and say that God saved him at the point of baptism by bringing the one who was baptized into a covenant relationship.

If baptism is inseparably linked to our salvation, then it is absolutely necessary that we understand its significance. Our church heritage or traditions will not help us in this study. Our only source of information must come from God's revelation on the matter, and thus, the Bible can be our only textbook. In other words, our understanding of baptism can never be a subjective study in reference to our religious heritage. On the contrary, it must always be a study that is solidly based on the word of God.

• **Satan's work to deceive: We must never forget that what is most important for one to do in order to be saved is where Satan will certainly do his best work to deceive us.** Since the subject of baptism has been a highly controversial subject in religious circles for centuries, then we would assume that Satan is at work in this matter. If baptism is necessary for salvation, then we would assume that Satan would be doing some of his greatest deceptive work with our understanding of this subject.

Some would question why we should devote such a lengthy discussion to this subject. There are two reasons for this: The first reason is because of the preceding work of Satan to deceive us concerning that which is most important in reference to our salvation. Since Satan has worked so well in confusing people concerning the importance of baptism, every Christian should thoroughly understand the Bible's teaching on the subject.

Second, in Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul listed baptism with seven fundamental teachings that must be believed as a disciple of Jesus. If baptism is listed as a fundamental teaching, then certainly it is not a subject to be avoided. It seems that the Holy Spirit knew that misguided theologians would allow Satan to deceive many people concerning the importance of baptism. For this reason, the Holy Spirit listed it with such

fundamental beliefs as “one God,” “one Spirit” and “one Lord.” Therefore, anyone who would assume that this subject is inconsequential to Christian belief and salvation has allowed himself to believe a deception of Satan concerning the importance of baptism.

- **The one baptism for remission of sins:** It is believed that the apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians from a prison in Rome in A.D. 61,62. In this letter he stated that there was at that time only **one baptism** (Ep 4:4-6). Taking into consideration the book of Acts, and the history of the church after Acts 2, this one baptism was the baptism that was obeyed by the Ephesians (At 19:1-6), the Corinthians (At 18:8), the Samaritans (At 8:5-13), and thousands of others who responded to the gospel of Jesus in the first century. This one baptism was **immersion in water for remission of sins**.

Baptism for remission of sins was first mentioned in Mark 1:4 in the preaching of John the Baptist. *“John came in the wilderness baptizing and preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”* This baptism was not in the “name of Jesus,” for Jesus had not yet come preaching the coming of the kingdom of God. John was preparing the way for something that would be very important for those who would believe on the One about whom he spoke.

The second time we encounter a baptism for the remission of sins is in Acts 2:38. Peter proclaimed to a Pentecost audience, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* By the time Peter had made the statement of Acts 2:38, Jesus had died on the cross. He had been resurrected. He had ascended into heaven. Acts 2:38 is the one baptism about which Paul wrote in Ephesians 4. This is the baptism that supersedes all other baptisms that are mentioned in the New Testament.

- **The action of baptism:** The mode or manner of the one baptism is by immersion. In fact, baptism is immersion. This is the true meaning of the Greek word from which we construct the transliterated word “baptize.” Nevertheless, there has always been much debate in the religious world concerning the mode or manner of baptism.



(In this book we will use the words “immerse” and “baptism” interchangeably. However, we do this only to accommodate present religious discussion. The word “baptism” is so common in religious discussions that it is often difficult to ignore the function of “immersion” when talking about the subject.)

Many religious groups have made unbiblical changes concerning the manner of baptism. Some have stated that baptism may be “performed” in any one of three ways: by sprinkling, pouring or immersion. It is claimed by some that one manner is just as good as another. As long as one has some type of a “conversion experience,” then it is assumed that the manner by which one baptized is not relevant. It is thus affirmed that one has the right to choose the manner by which he or she will be baptized.

There are many religious leaders today who have totally rejected the practice of immersion. In the religious world there has developed the belief that baptism in any form is not linked to one’s salvation. The new birth can be either a conversion experience or an emotional euphoria. If one wants to be baptized, then such is optional.

With many religious groups there is no longer any debate over either the manner of baptism or the necessity thereof. Baptism has simply dropped out of the discussions of many religious groups. Preachers have become indifferent to discussions surrounding the subject, believing that because baptism is supposedly not necessary for salvation, then there is no need for any debate on the subject.

- **The right candidates:** There is also the host of religious groups that practice infant baptism. This practice originated out of an unfortunate belief that babies are inherent sinners because of a supposed “original sin” with which one is born as a result of the sin of Adam. It is believed that at birth babies inherit the supposed sin of Adam. They are thus in need of baptism for the remission of sins.

- **An important subject:** We do not pretend to write a complete study of the subject on baptism. However, we do want to present some of the most important aspects of the subject as they are stated in the

Scriptures. Since the word “baptism” in either a noun or verb form is mentioned over one hundred times in the New Testament, we must assume that this is a very important subject for discussion. We cannot simply pass over this subject if we claim allegiance to the Bible as our authority in matters of faith. Any effort to relegate baptism to some practice of ancient religious sacraments is simply not acceptable. We must deal with this subject that has been a point of discussion in the past and present because it is mentioned so many times in the New Testament.

In the following chapters we will affirm that immersion in water is necessary in order to establish a covenant relationship with God. Without this relationship, there is no salvation, and thus, without baptism there is no relationship with God. It is our prayer that each reader will consider the main points of each of the following chapters with a desire to fully understand the nature and purpose of baptism.

We live in a generation of religions that have gone in two directions on this subject. First, there is a legal oriented group that views baptism as some kind of “church sacrament.” Such is evidenced in how we approach our youth. Some say, “Isn’t it time, young man, that you get baptized?” The problem is that we often do not focus on commitment to Jesus when we ask this question. There is no call to commit one’s life to Jesus in response to the incarnate offering of the Son of God. It is assumed that one simply perform a legal action of immersion, and subsequently one is accepted in the sight of God.

Some have digressed to the point of simply “making sure someone knows what he or she is doing” before they are baptized. So we sit down and go through the facts. As long as one knows the facts, then we assume that one is ready to be baptized. Dedicated commitment from the heart to live a sacrificial life for Jesus is only incidental. Understanding the covenant relationship one is establishing with God in baptism is secondary. Some have, therefore, encouraged people to just “get baptized” in order to fulfill a legal requirement for salvation, and then take one’s seat in a pew. In doing so, there is often little focus on the incarnational offering of the Son of God.

The second group that is in trouble are those who have run through

Jerusalem in search of unity with anyone who would believe in Jesus. This group has sacrificed baptism for fellowship with anyone who shows up calling on Jesus. As long as one claims to have some kind of conversion experience, and manifests some type of commitment to Jesus, then he or she is accepted into fellowship. Obedience to the gospel in immersion is not important.

- **Cheated:** In this discussion we would challenge the preceding misconceptions. We believe there are too many people who are missing the point of a most important New Testament teaching. Too many people are cheating themselves of a life of dedicated commitment of living in response to the gospel. Baptism is not simply a legal act of law-keeping, but the response of one who has understood the incarnational sacrifice of the Son of God. It is this theme that we seek to emphasize in this book.

## Chapter 1

### DEFINITION OF *BAPTIZO*

Much of the confusion that arises out of discussions over religious matters results from a misunderstanding concerning the definition of words. In a study of the subject of baptism, much of the controversy would be eliminated if just one word in the New Testament had been properly translated in 1611 by the *King James Version*. This one word is the Greek word *baptizo*.

There are two things to understand concerning the word *baptizo*. First, the English word “baptize” is a **transliteration** of the Greek word *baptizo*. Second, this Greek word was used in the first century to express the action of immersion, dipping, plunging or overwhelming. All Greek lexicons (dictionaries) and church historians agree on this definition.

#### A. **Transliteration of *baptizo*:**

Transliteration is the practice of writing in alphabetical characters the sound of the words of one language into the same sound of alphabetical characters of another language. This is what took place when the Greek word *baptizo* was transliterated in 1611 by the translators of the *King James Version*. The Greek word *baptizo* became “baptize.”

When the Church of England translators translated the *King James Version* of the New Testament in 1611, they chose to **transliterate** the Greek word *baptizo* instead of translating it. They did this because there were many religious groups at the time who were sprinkling people and calling it baptism. We thus live today with this same unfortunate action of past religionists and translators.

The unfortunate transliteration has caused much confusion in the study and practice of baptism. In fact, if this word were properly translated, there would be no need for this discussion on what the word means.

## B. Lexicon definition of *baptizo*:

When we study the Greek word *baptizo*, there is no misunderstanding of the actual meaning of the word as it is defined by Greek lexicons. In the Greek lexicon of Arndt and Gingrich, *baptizo* is defined as “dip,” or “immerse.” In Thayer’s lexicon the word is defined “to dip repeatedly,” “to immerse,” or “submerge.” The Abbott-Smith lexicon defines the word, “to dip, immerse, sink, or to overwhelm.” In his comprehensive book on New Testament words, W. E. Vine said that baptism is “the process of immersion, submersion and emergence.”

**There are no Greek lexicons that define *baptizo* in any other way than the definition that is given by accepted Greek lexicons.** Therefore, when reading the New Testament, Bible students should almost always read the word “immerse” when they see the word “baptize” in the text.

The well known church historian, Philip Schaff, wrote, “Unquestionably, immersion expresses the idea of baptism.” The world accepted *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* stated,

It is noteworthy that here [Mark 7:4] *rhantizo* [the Greek word for “sprinkle”] is used in contrast with *baptizo* showing that baptize did not mean sprinkle.

All church historians will agree with these statements.

Anyone who defines *baptizo* to mean “sprinkle” or “pouring” is arguing against the best scholarship of the biblical world. All accepted Greek lexicons and church historians affirm that the primary meaning of the word *baptizo* is immersion. Therefore, no matter what one has been taught previously on the matter, he or she must accept this definition of the word. This is the correct definition and the one that must be understood when the word “baptize” is read in the text of the New Testament.

The fact is that defining the word “baptism” should not of necessity be include in a book on the subject of baptism. If the word was translated correctly in Bibles throughout the world, there would be no

need to define the word, and thus no need for a discussion on the subject in a chapter as this. It would be like defining the word “immersion” by trying to convince people that immersion means “immersion.”

Nevertheless, Satan has done his work well. Millions of people throughout the religious world today are confused concerning the definition of the word “baptism.” They are confused because religious leaders who know the truth on this matter are not teaching the truth that the meaning of the word *baptizo* is immersion, not sprinkling or pouring.

### C. Textual definition of *baptizo*:

The final dictionary to determine the meaning of any word in the Bible is the context in which the word is used. When we turn to the New Testament, there is a clear definition of the word *baptizo*. There are two key passages in the New Testament that clearly demonstrate that baptism is a burial, and not sprinkling or pouring.

**1. Colossians 2:12:** To the Colossians, Paul wrote that they were “*buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead.*” The action of baptism could not be stated more clearly. One is **buried** in baptism, after which he is **raised** from the grave of water just as Jesus was **raised** from the grave by the Father.

In order for one to be raised, one must first be buried. The phrase “raised with Him” assumes a burial. There can be no resurrection with Jesus when He comes again unless one has experienced the first resurrection with Jesus from the waters of baptism.

**2. Romans 6:3-5:** In Romans 6:3-5 Paul reveals that one is connected with the gospel through baptism. The central message of the gospel is the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. It is His burial and resurrection to give us hope of a future resurrection. Baptism in water, therefore, is obedience to the gospel. (More on this later.)

In Romans 6:3-5 Paul explained what happened to Jesus in His redemption for man. After His incarnation into the flesh of man, Jesus



**died** on the cross. He was **buried** in a tomb. On the third day after His death on the cross, He was **resurrected** from the tomb in order to ascend to the right hand of God in order to reign as King of kings. However, Paul's emphasis in Romans 6:3-5 is on what Christians have done in response to this gospel message.

Paul is saying that as Jesus was **buried** in the tomb, so we also are **buried** by baptism in a tomb of water. As Jesus was **resurrected** from the tomb, so we are also **resurrected** from the waters of baptism. In order to be in the likeness of Jesus' burial, we must be buried in water. Jesus was not sprinkled into the tomb. Neither is one sprinkled with water for burial today. One cannot be sprinkled with water, and at the same time to have been buried in water.

In conjunction with Colossians 2:12 and Romans 6:3-6, there is an important rule of Bible study to be considered: **The true meaning or synonym of a word can be put in the place of the word in the text or sentence in which it is used without changing the meaning of that text or sentence in which the original word was used.** If baptism means "sprinkling" or "pouring," then these definitions can be substituted in the text where the word "baptism" is used without any change in the textual meaning. If we substitute the meaning "sprinkling" or "pouring" in the text of Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 for the word "baptism," then the meaning of the text **changes** because the meaning of baptism is not sprinkling or pouring. Notice how this substitution would change the meaning of the text of Romans 6:3-5.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were [**sprinkled**] into Christ Jesus were [**sprinkled**] into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through [**sprinkling**] into death.

The reason Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 make no sense with the above substitution is because baptism does not mean "sprinkling" or "pouring." The word means "immerse." The synonym "immersion" can be substituted in the texts of Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:12 without changing the meaning of what the inspired writer was

trying to convey. And what the writer was trying to convey is that we are immersed in obedience to the gospel.

#### **D. Circumstances surrounding baptism:**

The events that took place during various cases of baptism in the New Testament reveal that only immersion could have been the correct action of baptism.

**1. *Much water is needed in order to accomplish the action of baptism.*** In John 3:23 we read that John the Baptist “*was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was **much water there.***” Why would John be baptizing in a location where there was **much water** if baptism required only a little water? If baptism were by sprinkling or pouring, then he could have brought the water in a jug or jar to the ones who were to be baptized. But the fact that John had to take the ones who were to be baptized to a place of much water assumes that baptism was by immersion, and much water is needed for immersion.

**2. *“Going down into the water” is required in order to accomplish the action of baptism.*** In Acts 8:26-40 the Ethiopian eunuch was taught of Jesus and baptized by Philip, the evangelist. As he and Philip went on their way in a chariot, the eunuch “*commanded the chariot to stand still. **And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away***” (vss 38,39).

We would wonder why both Philip and the eunuch had to go down into the water in order for the eunuch to be baptized if only sprinkling were involved in the baptism. Why get completely wet when one could just stand on the bank of a river, dip out a little water, and then sprinkle it on the subject’s head? The fact that Philip had to dip or immerse the eunuch completely under water assumes that there was much water present for immersion.

This same example for immersion is also seen in the baptism of Jesus. Matthew 3:16 reads, “*And Jesus, when He was baptized, **went up immediately out the water.***” John and Jesus had gone down into

the water in order that Jesus might be immersed by John in much water. The action of immersion necessitates that one go down into the water.

The historical evidence that defines *baptizo* to mean immersion is consistent and in agreement with all Greek lexicons. There is no evidence to the contrary. It would seem, therefore, that in this area of study of baptism there can be no debate. Baptism is by immersion. To ignore this fact would be refusing the scholarship of the world in reference to the definition of the word *baptizo*.

The English words “baptize” and “baptism” have now become so accepted in the religious world that there are few publishing houses who have the courage to translate the words properly in published translations of the New Testament. We have found that the intimidation of the religious world is so strong, that book publishing houses have rejected a literal translation of *baptizo* for the sake of many religious groups who continue to sprinkle people and call it baptism.

What is encouraging, however, is that the religious world to a great extent is now accepting the fact that baptism is by immersion. The exceptions are those groups who continue to cling to their traditional heritage of sprinkling. However, most of the evangelical religious groups have given up sprinkling in order to restore the original action of immersion.

We must remind ourselves again that what is most important for one to do in order to be saved is where Satan will do his best work. In the area surrounding baptism in obedience to the gospel, Satan has done well to confuse many people by leading them to believe that they have been baptized when they have only been sprinkled with water.

There are still many religious groups throughout the world who have substituted sprinkling for the action of baptism. However, this situation is rapidly changing, and thus we welcome the discussion concerning baptism by immersion. It is a discussion that is bringing forth a great deal of fruit as people throughout the world are thousands of people responding to the gospel, and subsequently being immersed for the remission of sins. It has now become the exception that people are sprinkled. The general practice today among religious groups around the world is baptism by immersion.

## Chapter 2

# BAPTISM AND CHURCH HISTORY

There is actually little discussion in the religious world today that centers around the practice of baptism in the early church. Anyone who has studied church history has discovered at least one common fact concerning discussions on baptism by the Christian writers of the second and third centuries. This one fact is that the early church **immersed** those who believed on Jesus. There is no history of sprinkling or pouring for baptism in the first, second and third centuries.

Present-day liberal religionists today who persist in sprinkling people, and calling it baptism, ignore the fact that their teaching that baptism is by sprinkling or pouring has no support in early church history. Therefore, if we are to restore the ancient order of baptism, then we must go all the way back to the first century. In doing this, the only valid book for research on this subject is the New Testament. Though the documents of ancient church historians after the writing of the New Testament are valuable resources, the New Testament must always be our final authority on any subject in reference to the beliefs and behavior of Christians.

In our studies of those who have identified themselves with Christianity today, many have progressed from a true emphasis on the baptism of the first century to a total indifference toward the subject. In many churches today the subject is not even on the agenda for discussion. This seems to be the normal consensus among those religious groups who have ceased maintaining the Bible as their final authority in matters of faith. The result of this lack of emphasis on the Bible as our final authority in matters of faith today has led to some interesting admissions on the part of different theologians. They have researched the mode of baptism in the early church writings and have confessed that the early church practiced immersion.

The following are a few brief statements of some religious leaders and groups concerning the historical practice of baptism. These state-

ments indicate both the change of the mode and the purpose of baptism within the groups that are noted.

### **A. Ancient religious documents affirm immersion for baptism:**

Many years after the first century, some religious leaders started the practice of baptism by sprinkling or pouring. The first recorded case of sprinkling for baptism was that of **Novatian** who was very ill in bed, and thus sprinkled in bed no earlier than A.D. 250. When it was certain that Mr. Novatian would soon die, his friends hastened to perform some rite over him in order to assure his remission of sins. He was subsequently sprinkled with water and it was called baptism. However, Eusebius (A.D. 260 - 340) wrote later concerning this case:

Novatian, being relieved thereof by the exorcists, fell into a grievous distemper: and it being supposed that he would die immediately, he received baptism, being sprinkled with water, on the bed whereon he lay, (if that can be termed baptism).

In this first recorded case of sprinkling, it seems that Eusebius was apprehensive about calling sprinkling baptism. In this case, not only was the manner of baptism being changed, but also the approach by which some use the Bible. A religious practice was carried out on Novatian. Water was sprinkled on him. In order to make the practice “biblically” justifiable, those who carried out the deed plagiarized the Bible word “baptism” in order to validate their act. They applied a Bible word to a false action that was introduced by man.

This is still a common practice among religious people today. Religious plagiarists are still stealing words from the Bible and applying them to their religious practices that they have invented after their own desires or traditions. In an effort to make their religious practices appear to be biblical, they have used Bible names in reference to practices that have been invented by man. This is one of Satan’s greatest tools to deceive and confuse people concerning the truth about baptism.

The *Didache*, an ancient document that was written in the second

century, also reports of an occasion when sprinkling or pouring was substituted for immersion.

Concerning baptism, you baptize thus, having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living [running] water. But if you cannot in cold, in warm. But if you do not have either, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Here again is another substitution that has led to erroneous religious dogma today concerning the subject of baptism. In the above statement of the *Didache*, a religious act was again being called baptism. In this case, if what God requires is not convenient, then it is believed that one is justified to change God's will. This is not an uncommon practice among religious groups today. This is probably one of the greatest forces among religious people concerning the changing of immersion to sprinkling. If immersion is not convenient, it is believed that we have a right to change to sprinkling. In the book, *Faith of Our Fathers*, James Cardinal Gibbons, a Catholic Church authority admitted,

For several centuries after the establishment of Christianity, Baptism was usually conferred by immersion; but since the twelfth century the practice of baptizing by infusion has prevailed in the Catholic Church, **as this manner is attended with less inconvenience than Baptism by immersion** [emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

Sincere Bible students agree that religious counsels of men have no right to change the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*. Nevertheless, such seems to be what continues to happen with those who produce religious writings for their churches.

What has happened among some religious groups is that the word "baptism" has moved so far away from the original meaning of *baptizo* that it has assumed an entirely different meaning. In order to solve this confusion, some have taken it upon themselves to determine their own



meaning for the word for their particular religious group. They have determined the meaning of *baptizo* by their traditional practice of sprinkling. Today, when people read their Bibles, they understand that the word “baptism” means sprinkling because their particular religious group has practiced sprinkling for baptism for decades, if not centuries.

However, honest Bible scholars today, and all ancient church historians, agree that first century baptism was by immersion. After the first century, an apostasy led people to believe that sprinkling was the right manner of baptism. Recognition of this historical digression poses a challenge to those today who have been practicing either sprinkling or pouring and calling it baptism. Either they must restore the New Testament practice of immersion, or they can continue after the religious traditions of men who have counterfeited a very sacred teaching of Jesus: “*He who believes and is baptized [immersed], will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). What men often do in cases as this is what the Jews did. Jesus said of them, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*” (Mk 7:9).

## **B. Religious leaders agree that baptism was by immersion.**

Reference is made to important religious leaders here, not as an authority to establish biblical truth, but to show that many leaders of the past have correctly argued that the manner of baptism is by immersion. These, and many other religious historians, unanimously argued that baptism was by immersion in the first century.

**Martin Luther** said,

The name baptism is Greek; in Latin it can be rendered immersion, ... we immerse anything in water, that it may be all covered with water. And although that custom has now grown out of use ... **yet they ought to be entirely immersed, and immediately drawn out.**

**John Calvin** said,

**The very word baptize signified to immerse;** and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the primitive church.

**John Wesley** said,

We are buried with Him, alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.

Religious groups today who practice sprinkling and pouring, and call such baptism, are faced with a challenge. They have no authority of the first century church, nor one Greek scholar on biblical languages to support their present practice. They must make a decision. Either they take the position that man has a right to arbitrarily change Bible teachings and practices, or they must discard those religious practices that conflict with Bible teaching.

The power of traditional thought in the thinking of people is often very strong. Traditional patterns of belief and behavior are especially strong in the realm of religion. They are so strong that religionists will reject God's word in order to maintain a traditional belief or practice within the heritage of their religion. Again, we must remember Jesus' words to the Jewish religious leaders: "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9).

People are no different today than when Jesus spoke these words. For this reason, the vast majority of people who practice sprinkling and pouring will continue to do so. They are unfortunately caught in a religious scenario that is not biblically oriented. They have created a religion after their own traditions. They are in bondage to their heritage and to the majority of those of their faith who maintain teachings that contradict the Bible. And in respect to their fathers who maintained their present religious heritage, their heritage has become the authority of their faith.

Nevertheless, it is the duty of all to know the truth on this subject and to teach this truth. We do so to set people free from traditional religion that has been created after the desires of men. In reference to baptism, these traditions have now become the validation to identify

particular religious groups. Once traditional teachings become the standard upon which a particular religious group determines its identity, then it is very difficult to return to the word of God as the final authority in matters of faith.

### Chapter 3

## BAPTISM AND OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

In the world of religion throughout history there has probably been more discussion concerning the purpose and importance of baptism than any other New Testament teaching. By a casual reading of the New Testament one can clearly see that the subject takes a central role in reference to our salvation. In many passages of the New Testament, baptism is simply mentioned as a statement of fact. No detail is usually given concerning its purpose simply because the Holy Spirit assumed that we would gather from other contexts of the New Testament the full significance of baptism. And indeed, the full significance of what transpires in immersion is very important according to what the entire New Testament teaches on the subject.

For many centuries in the religious world there have been those who have believed that remission of sins, regeneration, and consequently, salvation, **preceded** one's obedience to the gospel in immersion. It is believed by some that there is an actual and real remission of sins at the point one believes in Jesus as his personal Savior, or goes through some subjective "conversion experience." It is affirmed that when one truly repents and believes in Jesus that he or she is born again. Baptism is only a confirmation of one's salvation. However, when this teaching is compared to the general teaching of the New Testament on the subject of baptism, something that is far different is discovered.

Another teaching that seems to be prevalent today is salvation through a subjective experience. In other words, as long as one has had some type of self-proclaimed salvational experience in his or her life,

such is an indication of one's acceptance by God. Baptism is only one experience in a selected catalog of optional experiences in which one may participate after a subjective salvational experience. The result of this teaching is the same as all teachings that do not emphasize the importance of immersion in reference to one responding to the gospel, or a consideration of all that the New Testament teaches concerning what is required for salvation.

Sometimes, baptism is often relegated to a simple legal work of self-justification. And since we are not saved by works of law, then baptism as a self-justifying work of obedience cannot be necessary in order to wash away sins. For this reason, in the following material we want to emphasize the purpose of baptism in relation to the salvation of one's soul. Baptism is not a church sacrament. It is not some meritorious work for salvation. It is not an inconsequential work that follows remission of sins. It is an objective response to what Jesus did for us through the gospel.

Contrary to the host of religious groups who deny the fact that baptism is essential to our salvation, the New Testament clearly connects immersion in water to obedience of the gospel. If one concludes that this is true, then there can be no argument against the teaching that at the point of baptism, that is in obedience to the gospel, one is saved.

What we must understand is that obedience to the gospel is one's response to the gospel. It is a response in the lives of those who have realized that the incarnate Son of God died for our sins. Therefore, obedience to the gospel is more than immersion in water for the remission of sins.

The preceding thought was introduced by Paul in **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9**. Paul wrote,

*... rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God **and who do not obey the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ. These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power.*

This statement teaches some encouraging things if one is a believer, specifically a baptized believer. **Jesus is coming again.** He is coming with His angels. If one has not obeyed the gospel, however, the teaching of 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 may be quite troubling. Jesus is coming to take vengeance on those who have not **obeyed the gospel.**

The deductive conclusion to what Paul stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 is that **one must obey the gospel** in order to escape the coming judgment and destruction. This truth is also stated as a question by Peter in 1 Peter 4:17: *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us, **what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?**”*

Both Peter and Paul revealed a very important truth concerning the gospel in reference to our obedience. Both 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and 1 Peter 4:17 were written as a warning to all those who seek to escape the coming destruction when Jesus comes again. It is at the point of baptism that our deliverance from this destruction is accomplished. Our response to the gospel in obedience connects us with the gospel when we were immersed into the saving death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. This is our escape plan from the coming destruction.

We must now ask and answer two questions that arise from the truth that is expressed in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and 1 Peter 4:17. We must first ask: **“What is the gospel?”** and then ask, **“How can one obey the gospel?”** Answering these two questions answers all questions in reference to the importance of immersion in relation to one’s salvation.

All agree that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rm 1:16). We would also agree that the verb “obey” in the phrase “obey the gospel” refers to action on the part of those who would respond to the gospel. The gospel is God’s work in reference to our salvation. Obedience is our response to God’s work. Therefore, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and 1 Peter 4:17 connect the work of God through the gospel with the obedience of man in order to be delivered from the coming judgment.

Once we determine the answers to the two preceding questions, we can easily determine the necessity of baptism in reference to one’s

salvation. Since both Paul and Peter connected God's work through the gospel, and man's response through obedience, we cannot separate the gospel from our obedience in reference to our salvation. Therefore, baptism is not an option in reference to our salvation. It is a necessity, for by baptism one obeys the gospel. The following points will clearly manifest that one must obey the gospel by immersion in water for remission of sins in order to be saved.

### A. What is the gospel?

There are some very important events to review concerning the definition of the gospel. The question is often asked concerning what the gospel is. The most common response is, "The gospel is the good news." This is partially right, but partially wrong. "Good news" is actually the meaning of the New Testament Greek word that we translate with the English word "gospel." It might be better to ask, "What is the good news?" This question will often bring mixed responses. At least, it gets us closer to understanding the gospel.

Unfortunately, many people affirm that the gospel (good news) is the teaching of Jesus or the Bible. Others affirm that Jesus is the gospel. This would be a correct answer if we understand that Jesus was more than a man, more than a good teacher, and that His coming to earth was for a salvational purpose. But we must determine how Jesus is good news in our relationship with God, with life, and with the judgment to come.

We once stood before approximately seventy-five preachers at a seminar on personal evangelism. We held up a copy of the Bible and asked, "Is this the gospel?" Almost everyone held up his hand. We then said, "This is not the gospel!" The preachers uncomfortably squirmed and thought that we were certainly missing a commonly accepted truth. However, after less than ten minutes of explanation, every preacher agreed that the gospel was **an event of history** that took place over two thousand years ago. This historical event is reported in the Bible.

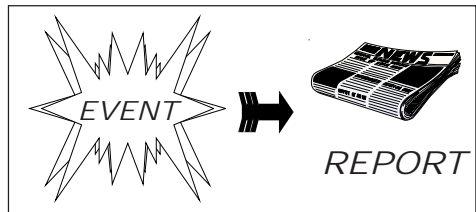
In the first century, men and women **heard** the gospel. They **be-**



**lied** the gospel. They **repented** in response to the gospel. They **confessed** Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. And finally, they were **baptized** in obedience to the gospel. This response to the historical event of the gospel revealed that the early believers understood that the gospel was far beyond the events that reveal the gospel. However, the fact that the gospel was revealed as an **event** that happened in history, and was reported to us today in the inspired New Testament, is evidence that people continue to respond to the historical events of the gospel. We thus read the New Testament as an inspired report from the Holy Spirit concerning the revelation of the gospel through an historical event.

The gospel of God's grace was revealed through an event that happened in history. It happened almost two thousand years ago and was reported in the pages of the New

Testament. As in any newspaper, the event happened **before** the report was written. Such is the case with the gospel and the report of its historical occurrence. Thousands of people re-



sponded to the gospel almost three decades before the gospel events were recorded in the New Testament. Therefore, when the early Christians went forth after the Pentecost of A.D. 30, they proclaimed the events of the gospel. People subsequently believed and obeyed the gospel. Their response to the gospel was eventually recorded in the New Testament letters that were written from the late 50s to the end of the first century.

**The report is not the event.** We believe the events because we trust the reliability of the reporter. By affirming that the gospel was revealed through an event in history, we can believe the gospel because we believe the truth of the inspired report. People personally experienced the occurrence of the events of the gospel. Matthew personally experienced the gospel events and wrote an inspired letter about them. Luke did not personally experience the



gospel events, for He did not live in Judea of Palestine. However, he interviewed eyewitnesses who had (Lk 1:1-4). He then wrote an inspired narrative of the events surrounding revelation of the gospel through the incarnation of the Son of God. Therefore, the records we have concerning the gospel are inspired **reports**. They are reports of the greatest breaking news that has happened in the history of the world. When we read the New Testament, therefore, we are reading about this great historical events that have changed the lives of millions.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 Paul explained, *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, that Christ **died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**”* Jesus did not just die on a cross. He died on a cross for our sins. He was buried and rose again in order to give us hope of eternal life. **Including the good news of the incarnation of the Son of God in Bethlehem of Judea, the primary gospel events are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that reveal good news. The primary focus of the gospel was the sacrificial offering of the incarnate Son of God on the cross.** This is the good news that solves the problems of both spiritual and physical death.

We must remember that the gospel is good news. But how is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus good news for us today? Paul explained, *“**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**”* (Rm 3:23). The result of sin against God is death. Isaiah wrote, *“**But your iniquities have separated you from your God**”* (Is 59:2). Therefore, when we think about sin, **we must think about separation from God.** And when we think about separation from God, we must think about spiritual death. Paul stated, *“**For the wages of sin is death**”* (Rm 6:23).

Sin, separation and death always go together. When we think about death, we must recognize our two greatest problems for which we need good news. Both problems involve death. The following are these two problems for which every man must find good news:

1. **Spiritual death:** Sin separates one from God, and thus, the alien sinner is spiritually dead as long as he or she lives in sin. This is

what Paul meant in Romans 5:12: *“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, and so death passed to all men because all sinned.”* When Adam personally sinned against God, he was personally separated from God because of his own sin.

We do not inherit this **guilt** of Adam’s sin. Adam was responsible for his own sin before God. However, God says that every man has sinned after the example of Adam. Therefore, spiritual death passes to all men because *“there is none righteous, no, not one ... **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**”* (Rm 3:10,23).

Without the good news of the cross one is *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ep 2:1). This is man’s first and greatest problem! This problem means that we must be **reconciled** to God. We must be brought back into a saved relationship with our Creator. The totality of the events of the gospel answers this problem, **for Jesus was incarnate into the flesh of man in order to die for our sins on the cross** (1 Co 15:3). Jesus died in order to offer to all people the opportunity to be reconciled to God through obedience to the gospel. This is good news because it gives every person on earth an opportunity to be reconciled to God through the cross.

**2. Physical death:** Physical death entered into the world when Adam was separated from the tree of life. After Adam sinned, God stated,

*“Behold, the man has become as one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, he must not be allowed to put forth his hand and take of the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”* Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden (See Gn 3:22-24).

All humanity was thus separated from the tree of life when Adam was driven from the tree of life. As a result, it is appointed unto all of us that we must physically die (Hb 9:27). The Holy Spirit stated, *“For as in Adam all die”* (1 Co 15:22). All of us suffer from the **consequences** of Adam’s sin. It is for this reason that the gospel is good news concerning our second greatest problem, the problem of physical death. The Spirit continued, *“Even so in Christ all will be made alive”*

(1 Co 15:22). Therefore, **in Christ** the obedient will be made alive. They will live forever. **This is good news!**

We must remember that our first greatest problem is our **spiritual separation from God** that has resulted from our personal sins against God. We must take ownership of our personal sins, for without Christ and the cross we are “*dead in our trespasses and sins*” (Ep 2:1). The gospel is good news because Jesus came to die for our personal sins against God. Man’s second greatest problem is that each one of us will eventually suffer physical death. We need good news for this problem. Jesus was raised to never die again. He was raised with an eternal, incorruptible body. Those who are in Christ will likewise be raised when He comes again (See 1 Th 4:13-18). They too will receive an incorruptible body. The apostle John wrote,

*Beloved, now we are the children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2).*

Since the gospel was revealed through the historical events of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, these events must be applied to what Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. One’s connection with these historical events emphasizes the necessity of baptism in reference to our salvation.

## **B. How can one obey the gospel?**

Romans 6:3-6 answers this question. One must first believe that the Son of God was incarnate into the flesh of man in order to go to the cross for our salvation. Jesus came preaching, “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*” (Mk 1:15). **In order to be saved by the good news that was brought into the world by the Son of God, one must believe in the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and consummation of all things when Jesus returns for those who have obeyed this gospel message.** John came preaching that Jesus was the Savior

who came into the world. He was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29).

People must believe in Jesus before they will respond to the atoning death of Jesus on the cross and His hope-giving resurrection. John wrote an entire New Testament book in order to convince people that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God who came into the world for the salvation of all those who would believe on Him. John wrote,

*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples that are not written in his book. But these are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through His name (Jn 20:30,31).*

In Romans 6:3 Paul asked the Christians in Rome a question: “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?***” We must keep in mind that the background for what Paul wrote in Romans 6 is our **death to sin in which we once lived**. One should read through the entire chapter of Romans 6 and count how many times the words “death,” “die,” “died” and “dead” are used in reference to the Christian’s life of gospel living in relation to his or her past life of living in sin.

In the phrase, “baptized into His death,” the English word “into” is from the Greek word *eis*. In the context, reference must be to a metaphorical use of *eis*. In Matthew 28:19 one is baptized **into** (*eis*) “*the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*” In both texts (Mt 28:19; Rm 6:3), the meaning is understood by how both Paul and Matthew used the Greek word *eis*.

According to Matthew’s record of Jesus’ use of the word *eis*, when one is baptized, he or she is baptized into a **relationship** with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Romans 6, Paul’s emphasis is on being baptized into a relationship with the death of Jesus on the cross. Herein, therefore, is the theme of Romans 6: “*How will we who died to sin live any longer therein?*” (Rm 6:2).

In Romans 6 Paul’s argument is clear. Christians have come into a relationship with Jesus by putting to death the old man who walked in

sin. Therefore, “*he who has died [with Christ in obedience to the gospel] has been freed from sin*” (Rm 6:7). But when did the old man die? When was the old man buried? When was the new man resurrected?

Jesus died almost two thousand years ago in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, today one can be “baptized into His death” without going to Jerusalem and back in time. Paul explained this in Romans 6:4:

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also might walk in newness of life.*

The answer to the question that was posed in Romans 6:3 is answered in verse 4. Therefore, it would be hard to miss Paul’s explanation of how to be baptized into the death of Jesus in obedience to the gospel. Notice the preposition “with.” By immersion in water one goes to the grave **with** Jesus. One joins **with** Christ in His death through his personal “crucifixion” of the old man in repentance.

Something great and spiritual happens in baptism. Jesus was buried. In obedience to this gospel event, **we are also buried with Him**. In baptism, the alien sinner comes into a spiritual union with Jesus. A covenant is established the Father, Son and Holy Spirit when one is baptized into (*eis*) Christ. A relationship with God is established as a result of one coming into contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus in one’s baptism into Christ.

Because of the seriousness of this teaching, Paul repeated the answer to the question of Romans 6:3 again in verse 5, but with different words and phrases: “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be in the likeness of His resurrection.*”

By immersion into Jesus one is **united together** in the likeness of Jesus’ death. As Jesus went to the tomb almost two thousand years ago, so we can also go to the tomb of water together with Him today. Subsequently, we are raised with Him in order to walk in newness of life. This is great news! In Colossians 2:12 Paul stated that the Colossians were “***buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised***



*with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead.”*

In immersion, therefore, one is buried with Jesus. He or she is also raised with Jesus. In baptism one obeys the gospel of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. However, before one goes to the grave with Jesus, he or she must also go to the cross. Paul explains this in verse 6:

*... knowing this, that our old man was **crucified with Him** so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be the bondservants of sin.*

Here again is the preposition “with.” Jesus was crucified. We must also be crucified **with** Him. The old man of sin died **with** Jesus on the cross. Our old man of greed, selfishness, drunkenness, worldliness or pride must be crucified **with** Jesus. Paul wrote concerning his personal crucifixion, *“I have been crucified **with** Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gl 2:20).

**Everyone must be crucified with Jesus before they can be buried with Him in the waters of baptism.** Peter said it in the following words: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (At 2:38). When Jesus died on the cross, He took with Him the sins of all mankind. Our old man of sin died with Jesus on the cross. It is dead. But in order for one to live, there must be a burial and resurrection in order to come into contact with the saving gospel redemption of Jesus. There is no life, therefore, without burial and resurrection from water for remission of sins.

Now the second question that 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 posed has been answered. How can one obey the gospel in order to escape the coming destruction that Jesus will render to those who reject Him? The answer is simple. By crucifying the old man of sin with Jesus on the cross of repentance, burying that old man with Jesus in a tomb of water, and then resurrection the new man with Christ, one can escape the coming termination that all who have not obeyed the gospel will

experience when Jesus comes again.

The gospel “*is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes*” by joining himself or herself with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection (Rm 1:16). The gospel can be the power of God unto salvation only to those who connect with Jesus through obedience to the gospel. Obedience to the gospel by immersion, therefore, explains why and how the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

The gospel is the death of Jesus for our sin problem. This is great news! The gospel is the resurrection of Jesus for our physical death problem. This is great news! When one is immersed into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, then he or she has obeyed the gospel, and thus, is saved by being connected with the cleansing blood of Jesus. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the power of God unto salvation to all those who are baptized.

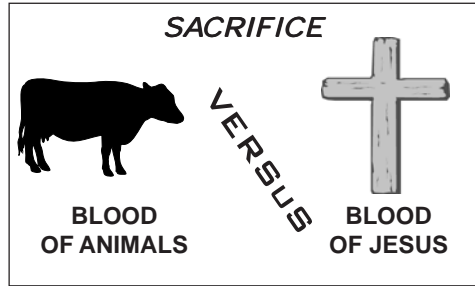
Because the gospel is the medium through which all people must come to God in order to be saved, it is imperative that we accept God’s instructions on how to connect. When we connect with Him on the cross, we can rejoice with Him in His resurrection through our own resurrection from the grave of water. If we try to establish our own conditions for a connection with God, then certainly we are ignoring the incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh and all that He has accomplished through His atoning sacrifice to bring us into eternal glory in the presence of God.

## **Chapter 4**

### **BAPTISM AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS**

God has always ordained that “*without shedding of blood there is no remission*” (Hb 9:22). He required a blood sacrifice of Abel and of all who lived before the giving of the Sinai law on Mount Sinai (Gn 4:4,5). Even the Sinai law and covenant itself were dedicated with the “*blood of calves and goats*” (Hb 9:19). God established a covenant with Israel that demanded a continual offering of blood sacrifices be-

cause “it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hb 10:4). The priests of Israel, therefore, had to offer animal sacrifices that could never take away sins, either temporarily or on a continual basis (See Hb 10:1-4). Fortunately, these blood sacrifices were “*a shadow of the good things to come*” (Hb 10:1). They had to be offered in obedience to God’s commandments and in preparation for the outpouring of the blood of Jesus that was to come (See Rm 3:25; Hb 9:15). But they were never meant to be continually offered forever.



The “good things” of which the Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow was the gospel sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The cross surpassed the animal sacrifices because Jesus “*offered one sacrifice for sins forever*” (Hb 10:12). By that “*one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*” (Hb 10:14). Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God who “*takes away the sin of the world*” (Jn 1:29). He did this act of sanctification by bearing “*our sins in His body on the tree [cross]*” (1 Pt 2:24). Thus, Jesus’ blood was the “*blood of the new covenant*” (Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20).

Jesus will make a new covenant with all those who submit to His lordship through their response to the gospel of the incarnation, cross, resurrection and coronation. Those who have submitted are called the church. The members of His body, the church, are thus sanctified and purchased by His blood that every saint contacts upon his or her baptism into Christ (At 20:28).

It is essential to understand that the church, the fellowship of the submitted, **is a blood-purchased group of God’s people**. All those who are a part of this body have been redeemed “*through His blood*” (Ep 1:7). We are a church of saints because we have been “*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood*” (Rm 3:24,25). Christians have “*now been justified by His blood*” (Rm 5:9). They

*“have been brought near by the blood of Jesus”* (Ep 2:13).

Not only does the blood of Jesus offer a onetime cleansing when one comes into a covenant relationship with Jesus, it functions as a continual cleansing of sins as we walk in the light of God’s will. John wrote, *“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7). It is imperative to understand, therefore, that those who are **in Christ** are in a relationship with God, and thus, continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus. These are those who have *“washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* (Rv 7:14). It is only the obedient who are sanctified by the blood of Jesus. Only Christians have the privilege of the continual cleansing by the blood of Jesus. As a Christian, therefore, there is no need to perform good works in order to self-righteously sanctify ourselves of sin. All sanctification in reference to sin was accomplished at the cross, with the continuing affect of the blood of Jesus that flows from the cross. If we were to attempt to sanctify ourselves of our own sin, then we would be saying that the sanctification of Jesus on the cross was not sufficient.

The important question to ask here is: **How does one come into contact with the cleansing blood of the Lamb?** It is obvious that Jesus’ cleansing blood does not **unconditionally** cleanse everyone in the world of sin. If everyone were unconditionally cleansed of sin, then the entire world would be saved. There would be no need to preach the gospel to a world of saved people. Therefore, **there must be something that people must do in order to contact the saving blood of Jesus.** There must be something that will bring one into a saving relationship with Jesus whereby one contacts the saving and sanctifying blood of Jesus. There must also be a specific point in time at which Jesus’ cleansing blood is made applicable in the regeneration of the individual’s soul. The New Testament affirms here that at the point of baptism this regeneration takes place.

God knew that people needed a specific time to which they could refer and confidently affirm that they were saved. This point in time could not be a subjective emotional experience. Subjective experi-

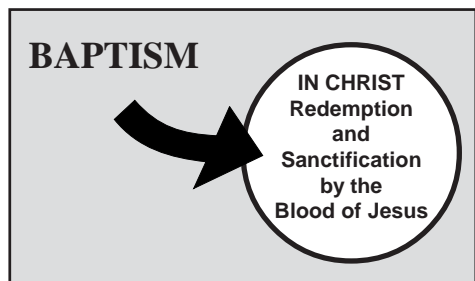
ences would occur throughout the life of the Christian. Each experience would be based on greater knowledge and spiritual awareness than previous experiences. Therefore, with the occurrence of each experience, the individual would possibly question previous self-proclaimed salvational experiences of his or her supposed salvation. For this reason, God knew that we needed an exact point in time for our salvation when He declared us to be saved. Salvation would never be self-declared. Concerning the Christian's salvation, that specific time is when one by faith, responds to the gospel. This is that time in the life of a person when he or she comes into contact with the blood of Jesus, and thus can rejoice in the fact that all past sins have been washed away.

### A. **One contacts the blood of Jesus when one is baptized,**

Everyone would agree that contact with the blood of Christ is absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of sins. There are two points that must be considered here that introduce us to the conclusion that baptism into Christ brings one into contact with the blood of Jesus.

1. ***Redemption by Jesus' blood is "in Christ."*** John wrote in Revelation 5:9 that Jesus redeemed us **by His blood**. Notice in Ephesians 1:7 that it is **in Christ** that "*we have our redemption through His blood.*" It is in Christ that "*we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (Cl 1:14). We must keep in mind that **redemption is in Christ** and that **redemption is by the blood of Christ**. One must be in Christ, therefore, in order to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus. One must establish an "in Christ" covenant relationship with Jesus in order to benefit from the continual sanctifying power of His blood. Without this "in Christ" relationship with our Redeemer, there can be no sanctification by the blood of Jesus.

2. ***Sanctification is by Jesus' blood "in Christ."*** He-



brews 13:12 reads, “*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.*” John wrote that “*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7). Christians have “*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Rv 7:14).

We cannot question the fact that sanctification was accomplished by the blood of Jesus at the cross. It is also necessary to recognize that sanctification in reference to our sins is in Christ. Paul wrote to the “*church of God that is at Corinth, to those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*” (1 Co 1:2). These same Christians in Corinth had been washed and sanctified “*in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (1 Co 6:11). No one can question the fact that **one must be in Christ in order to be sanctified by the blood of Jesus**. For this reason we strongly affirm that one must be in Christ—in the body of Christ—in order to have the privilege of the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus.

From the above two points we would obviously conclude that redemption is accomplished by the blood of Jesus and that **redemption is in Christ**. Sanctification is accomplished by the blood of Christ and **sanctification is in Christ**. Therefore, it is necessary to determine how one comes into Christ.

Romans 6:3 clearly answers the question concerning how one comes into a covenant relationship with Jesus and His cleansing blood “in Christ.” “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*” Paul said the same thing in Galatians 3:27: “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*”

**One must therefore be baptized into Christ in order to come into contact with the redemption and sanctification that is provided by the blood of Jesus in Christ.** We can conclude that those who are in sin can come into contact with the blood of Christ only when they are baptized into Christ.

**If one is saved by the blood of Jesus on the basis of a self-proclaimed “salvation experience,” then the condition for one’s salvation would be proclaimed by man, not God. However, if one is**

**saved at the point where God says he has remission of sins through the blood of His Son, then it is God who proclaims our salvation.**

One has the choice of establishing his salvation on his own self-proclamation or on the fact that God has stated in Scripture that those who have responded to the gospel have remission of sins when baptized into Christ, wherein one is redeemed and sanctified.

## **B. Washing by the blood of Jesus takes place at baptism.**

Christians have “*washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Rv 7:14). To the Christians in Corinth, Paul wrote, “*You were washed ... you were sanctified*” (1 Co 6:11). This is the same as the “*washing of regeneration*” that Paul discussed in Titus 3:5. Jesus has “*washed us from our sins in His own blood*” (Rv 1:5). The “*washing of regeneration*” is the result of the sanctifying power of the blood of Jesus. When one is cleansed (sanctified) of sin, he or she is regenerated into a new life.

Acts 22:16 connects baptism with the washing of sins by the blood of Jesus. Ananias said to Paul, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” It would be right to conclude that one’s washing by the blood of Jesus is accomplished at the point of baptism. Past sins are washed away when one is baptized because it is at the point of baptism that the blood of Jesus comes into contact with our souls.

John taught that our washing (cleansing) by the blood of Jesus continues throughout our lives. He said that if we walk in the light “*the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7). It is at the point of immersion that the application of this continual cleansing begins. Therefore, in order for one to have the cleansing blood of Jesus in his or her life, he or she must respond to the gospel by immersion into Christ.

## **C. Baptism produces a good conscience through the blood.**

The Hebrew writer affirmed that “*the blood of Christ*” would



“*purge your conscience from dead works*” (Hb 9:14). We are created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ep 2:10). These works of obedience are made profitable by the blood of Jesus. One may do good works outside a covenant relationship with Jesus, however, these works are in vain. They are useless in reference to their continuing with us into eternal heaven. John recorded,

*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: blessed are the dead who die **in the Lord** from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, and **their works follow them**’ (Rv 14:13).*

Compare this thought with what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:58: “***Your labor is not in vain in the Lord.***” Our works are not dead or useless when we are in a covenant relationship with the Lord. We can conscientiously know that our works are not useless **in the Lord**. Baptism brings one into this realm of “useful” works that will follow one into eternity, for baptism brings one **into the Lord**.

Everyone realizes that he or she must obey the Lord. We must “*keep His commandments*” (Jn 15:14). He who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin (Js 4:17). If we do not do good, our conscience hurts us. We know when we are not being obedient. And, we know we can never do enough good works in order to be justified by our good works, for by meritorious good works no one can justify himself before God (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). We therefore have a conscience problem. We know we must be obedient to God. Our conscience is disturbed when we are not obedient. We know that we cannot do enough good works in order to atone for our sins against God. Our conscience is thus laden with guilt before God. Therefore, if one is conscious of God, then he or she must deal with how one’s conscience can be cleansed of guilt. The answer to a bad conscience is in the blood of Jesus.

In response to the gospel of Jesus, we purify our souls and cleanse our conscience before God (1 Pt 1:22). Jesus commanded, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). Baptism is an action of submission that Jesus asked all those who believe on Him to

do. In conjunction with this command, Peter stated, “*The like figure whereunto even baptism now saves us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the **appeal of a good conscience toward God** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pt 3:21).

In submitting to Jesus’ command to be immersed, one cleanses his or her conscience before God, for he or she knows that baptism is commanded by Jesus. One cannot have a good conscience toward the commandments of God unless he has submitted to the will of God. At the point of immersion one can objectively and biblically recognize that he has completed everything that is necessary to that point in his life to have his sins washed away. His conscience is clear at the point of baptism.

However, there is still the problem of sin the Christian will commit while struggling to live a gospel-obedient life. Good works can never atone for our sins simply because we cannot do enough good works to justify ourselves before God. The blood of Jesus cleanses all this, and thus keeps us justified before God. Therefore, “*if we walk in the light*” the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us of **all** sin (1 Jn 1:7-9). We can have a good conscience toward God through the blood of Jesus, for it is His blood that cleanses all our sins.

#### **D. We contact the blood in the body of Christ.**

We contact the blood of Jesus by being immersed into the blood-bought body of Christ. In Acts 20:28 Paul said that elders should feed “*the church of God **which He purchased with His own blood.***” Jesus is the “*Savior of the body,*” having given “*Himself for it, that He might **sanctify and cleanse it***” (Ep 5:23,24,26). He accomplished such by pouring out His blood upon the cross. But notice carefully what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “*For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body.***” The church is the blood-bought body of Christ. **In order to come into this body of blood-bought people one must be baptized.** One must be baptized into Christ, and thus into the body of Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27). Therefore, **in order to come into contact with the blood-bought body of Christ one must be immersed.**

Because of their obedience, Christians have come into a covenant relationship with Jesus. The first covenant, the Sinai covenant, was dedicated with the blood of animals (See Hb 9:18). By this dedication it was assumed that the second covenant, the covenant of Jesus, would also be dedicated by blood. But this dedication would be by a better sacrifice, for the blood would be that of the incarnate Son of God (Hb 9:18-27).

Only the sacrifice of God can take away sins. Jesus used the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper to represent the **blood of His covenant** (Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). When one is in a covenant relationship with Christ, he is sanctified by the blood of Christ. The Hebrew writer stated that the apostate Christian "*counted **the blood of the covenant** by which he was sanctified a common thing*" (Hb 10:29). Faithful Christians are in a covenant relationship with God. The blood of the covenant was made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus. To reject or turn away from this blood is to consider the divine atonement of the blood of Jesus an unholy thing. The Hebrew writer stated that there is no hope for those Christians who turn their back on the precious blood of Jesus.

*Of how much severer punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted as a common thing the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hb 10:29).*

One must purify himself in order to come into a covenant relationship with Deity. One must have his or her sins washed away by coming into contact with the incarnate blood of the Son of God through immersion (At 22:16). Immersion, therefore, is necessary in order to contact the cleansing blood of the covenant. It is also necessary to be continually sanctified while in a covenant relationship with Christ (1 Jn 1:7). We cannot, therefore, separate the blood of Christ from baptism into a covenant relationship with God.

This blessing is so precious that if one turns his back on the blood of the incarnate Son of God, there is no deliverance from the coming destruction. This in some way helps us understand the picture of hor-

ror that Paul painted for us when he wrote of the coming of the incarnate Son of God who paid such a tremendous sacrifice to bring us into the eternal presence of God (See 2 Th 1:6-9).

## Chapter 5

### BAPTISM AND REMISSION OF SINS

One of the most important statements by the Holy Spirit concerning baptism for remission of sins is the text of **Acts 2:38**. This statement was made by the apostle Peter in A.D. 30 at the conclusion of his preaching the gospel for the first time in history. It is a statement that has been discussed for many years, and rightly so, for if Peter's statement is taken for what it says, then many people have been deceived into believing many false teachings concerning baptism. It is incumbent on us, therefore, to determine exactly what Peter meant in this clear statement and the concepts that he wanted to convey concerning the remission of sins.

*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

One cannot be saved with the sins of his past life standing between him and God, for sin separates one from God (Is 59:1,2). One is dead to God as a result of sin (Rm 5:12). Therefore, every person on earth must take care of his or her sin problem before he or she can be reconciled to God. Sin must be forgiven in order that the individual be brought back into a saving relationship with God. This is a clear biblical teaching that few people will reject or deny.

In Acts 2:38 Peter stated that one's sins are remitted (forgiven) by God at the point of immersion. This is that specific time where God says that the old man of sin is buried with Christ and the new man comes alive (Rm 6:3-6). On the surface, and without any lengthy discussions, the conclusion is that baptism is necessary for the remission

of sins, and thus, necessary to be saved. This is the concept Peter wanted us to understand from his simple reply to those who wanted to respond to his message of the gospel.

However, every effort has been made throughout the years to deny the fact that at the point of baptism one's sins are forgiven. For this reason, it is necessary here that we study some of the principal arguments used against the teaching that at the point of obedience to the gospel by immersion God forgives all our past sins. One of these arguments involves the interpretation of the Greek word *eis*. A misunderstanding of this word has led to some confusion on the part of those who do not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation. However, when we understand the proper meaning of the word in the context in which it was used in Acts 2:38, we can easily understand that baptism is inseparably linked with remission of sins.

### **A. The Greek word *eis* means “for,” “unto,” “toward,” or “into.”**

Some have argued that the Greek word *eis*, that is translated “for” (or, “unto,” depending on your translation) in Acts 2:38 in the *King James Version*, actually means “because of.” Hence, Peter would have been saying, “Repent and be baptized **because of** the remission of sins.” But this interpretation, and translation, is not correct. The Greek word *eis* in this passage does not mean “because of.”

All accepted Greek dictionaries (lexicons) define the Greek word *eis* as it used in Acts 2:38 to mean “for, unto, towards, into, among, or, in order to.” *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* states that *eis* means “into,” “to,” “towards,” “for,” or “among.” The *Abbott-Smith Lexicon* says it means “into,” “unto,” “to,” “upon,” “towards,” “for,” or “among.” The *Arndt and Gingrich Greek Lexicon* states that *eis* means “in order to,” or “to.” In reference to Acts 2:38, Arndt and Gingrich state that *eis*, in conjunction with the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38, should be translated “for forgiveness of sin” or “so that sins might be forgiven.” **The fact is that there are no Greek lexicons or translations that use the wording “because of” in Acts 2:38 as a translation of the Greek word *eis*.** Therefore, if one takes the position that *eis* means “because of,” then

he or she must take a position that is against the scholarship of all accepted translations of Acts 2:38.

## **B. All accepted translations correctly translate Acts 2:38.**

It would be good here to note some major versions of the English New Testament and how the translators have translated Acts 2:38. All accepted translations of this passage render the Greek word *eis* according to the preceding accurate lexical definitions. Note the following examples:

### **Translations of Acts 2:38**

1. **King James Version:** “Repent and be baptized ... *for* the remission of sins.”
2. **English Revised Version:** “Repent ye, and be baptized ... *unto* the remission of sins.”
3. **American Standard Version:** “Repent ye, and be baptized ... *unto* the remission of sins.”
4. **New English Bible:** “‘Repent,’ said Peter, ‘repent and be baptized ... *for* the forgiveness of your sins’.”
5. **New International Version:** “Repent and be baptized ... *so that* your sins may be forgiven.”
6. **International King James Version:** “Repent and be baptized ... *for* the remission of sins.”

One could also refer to other English versions as the *Twentieth Century New Testament*, *Knox’s Translation*, *The Riverside New Testament*, *The American Bible Union Translation*, *Moffatt’s Translation*, *Philips’ New Testament*, and *The Amplified New Testament*. Such is a great testimony of modern-day scholarship behind the translation of *eis* to mean that one is immersed in order to reap the benefit of the remission of sins.

The best Greek scholarship in the world stands behind these translations and their correct translation of Acts 2:38. This scholarship states that in Acts 2:38 *eis* means either “to,” “for,” “unto,” or “toward.” There-

fore, according to Acts 2:38 one must be immersed in water in the name of Jesus in order to have the remission of sins. Without immersion one cannot have the remission of sins. And without the remission of sins there is no salvation.

One cannot stand before God in judgment with the stain of his or her own sins. God has provided the sacrifice for sins, and all men must submit to the conditions of accepting the offered sacrifice of His Son. This means that one must be immersed in water in the name of Jesus in order to have the remission of sins.

### C. **Matthew 12:41 does not define *eis* to mean “because of.”**

In conjunction with Acts 2:38, there are two important passages that must be considered in reference to the word *eis*. These are the passages of Matthew 12:41 and Matthew 26:38. The context of Matthew 12:41 is often misunderstood by those who argue against baptism being necessary in order to receive the remission of sins. This contention has led some to maintain an incorrect definition of the word *eis*. This incorrect definition is then applied to Acts 2:38. The result is an incorrect understanding of what Peter said in Acts 2:38.

**1. *Matthew 12:41*:** This passage is often used to prove that *eis* should, or could, be translated “because of” in Acts 2:38. Jesus said to the Jews, “*The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented unto [eis] the preaching of Jonah*” (*International King James Version*).

The word translated “unto” here is the Greek word *eis*. A misunderstanding of this passage has led some to believe that Jesus was emphasizing that the people of Nineveh repented **because of** the preaching of Jonah. The Ninevites did truly repent because of Jonah’s preaching. **However, the emphasis of Matthew 12:41 is that the Ninevites turned unto the way of life that Jonah preached.**

Jonah preached in Nineveh what God wanted the city to do in order to avert their coming punishment. He preached the word of God to which they had to conform their lives. When they repented, they



turned to the behavioral pattern of life that Jonah preached. In this sense, therefore, they repented **unto** (*eis*), or to that **at** which Jonah preached.

**2. Matthew 26:28:** Compare Matthew 12:41 with what Jesus said in Matthew 26:28: “*For this is My blood of the new covenant that is shed for many for [eis] the remission of sins.*” Here is the exact phrase (“for remission of sins”) that is used in Acts 2:38. The Greek word that is translated “for” in this scripture is the same Greek word that is used in Acts 2:38 and Matthew 12:41. It is the word *eis*. If the “because of” understanding of the word *eis* is carried over into the Matthew 26:28 statement, then Jesus’ blood was poured out “because of” the remission of sins, which makes no sense. The truth is that Jesus’ blood was poured out in order that repentant believers might have the forgiveness of all sins. We believe the latter question focuses on the correct answer.

If one contends that *eis* means “because of,” then we can claim that people had the remission of sins **without the death of Jesus on the cross**. If this is true, then we would naturally ask, Why did Jesus die on the cross in the first place? If the argument is true that *eis* means “because of” in the statement of Matthew 26:28, then Jesus would be making a statement that was totally contrary to the gospel that He introduced into the world.

This is not to say that the blood of Jesus did not cover the sins of those who lived before the cross. Sins before the cross were forgiven through the forthcoming offering of Jesus at the cross (Rm 3:25). However, they were forgiven only in view of the coming death of Jesus on the cross. All sin has been forgiven because of Jesus’ death on the cross. But Jesus had to die on the cross in order that all sins be forgiven at the cross, whether that sins were committed either before or after the cross.

The correct meaning of Matthew 26:28 is that Jesus died on the cross in order that people might have the remission of sins. Therefore, people are immersed according to Acts 2:38 after the cross in order to have remission of sins, for without remission of sins one cannot be saved. In immersion one comes into contact with that which produces

the remission of sins. One comes into contact with the blood of Jesus.

It is the blood of Jesus that produces the remission of sins, not the act of immersion or the water. It is at the time of immersion that God applies the blood of Jesus to one's sins. It is for this reason that the blood is directly connected with baptism. And without the blood of Jesus, there is no remission of sins. And without remission of sins, there is no salvation.

## Chapter 6

### BAPTISM AND BEING IN CHRIST

The New Testament uses many metaphors when discussion is centered around one's relationship with God. In those contexts of Scriptures wherein our salvation is under consideration, the Spirit has used metaphors in order to exemplify the nature of the believer's covenant with God. The reason for this is simple. When discussing relationships between that which is of this world to that which is of God, there are no human words that can adequately explain these relationships. Therefore, the Holy Spirit had to use human words with human definitions in order to take our minds beyond human experiences. In metaphor, therefore, we must think beyond the literal and earthly definition of the actual words. The Spirit wants us to stretch our imagination to the substance of a relationship that is beyond this world.

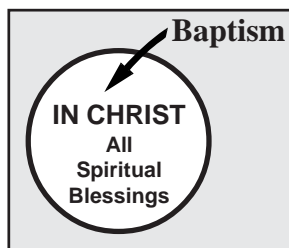
One of the important metaphors of the New Testament is a phrase that was commonly used by Paul. This metaphor was his use of the Greek word *en* in reference to one's relationship with Christ. The metaphor is used in the phrase "in Christ." The literal or actual meaning of the word *en* is not meant when the phrase "in Christ" is used. In other words, we are not physically inside the literal body of Jesus. Something **greater** than the literal and actual physical meaning is being emphasized when Paul used the phrase "in Christ." Therefore, we must look for a greater, or spiritual meaning when studying contexts in which the phrase "in Christ" is used.

In the New Testament, the phrase “in Christ” refers to a **relationship** one has with Christ. It is a Master-slave relationship, a Head-body union, and a King-subject servanthood. Jesus is the Master. Christians are the slaves (See Rm 6:17-20). He is the controlling head (Cl 1:18). We are the controlled body (1 Co 12:27). He is King Jesus reigning over all things with all authority (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15). Jesus commands; we obey. He speaks; we follow. Those who are in Christ have Jesus as the center of reference of their entire lives.

In this relationship with Christ, Christians have the benefit of many spiritual blessings that come from God concerning their salvation. In order for one to receive these spiritual blessings, however, he or she must come into an “in Christ” relationship with God.

### A. One has access to all spiritual blessings “in Christ.”

Paul wrote, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (Ep 1:3). This statement teaches that all spiritual blessings that God has to offer to every man concerning salvation are “in Christ.” It is assumed, therefore, **that “outside” Christ one does not have these blessings.** Outside Christ there are no blessings that one would have in relation to all that is necessary for one’s salvation.



In order for one to reap the spiritual blessings that relate to salvation, one must establish a relationship with God. Specifically, this relationship must be established with Jesus who made our salvation possible. We must emphasize the point that for one to establish this covenant relationship, **conditions** must be fulfilled. If spiritual blessings concerning one’s covenant relationship with God are unconditional, then all the world would be saved by the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. However, God has determined that people must respond to His free gift of grace. We must respond by obedience to the gospel. Our obedience to the gospel is the initial condition for our relationship with God.

Walking in the light of His word is a condition for maintaining one's relationship with God (1 Jn 1:7).

Being "in Christ" focuses on a spiritual covenant relationship with Christ. We come into this relationship through our commitment to the conditions that are God-determined and revealed through His word. Because Jesus took our old man of sin with Him to the cross, we respond with gratitude and repentance (2 Co 4:15). We are then buried with him in the waters of baptism in order to connect with His sacrificial death for us. When we have been baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are born into a covenant relationship with God. The following are the spiritual blessings that we have in our covenant relationship that we establish with God through our obedience to the gospel:

### **SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST**

**Forgiveness of sins (Ep 1:7)**

**Redemption (Rm 3:24; Cl 1:14)**

**A new creature (2 Co 5:17)**

**Sonship of God (Gl 3:26,27)**

**Eternal life (1 Jn 5:11)**

**The seal of the Spirit (Ep 1:13)**

**A state of no condemnation (Rm 8:1)**

**Sanctification from sin (1 Co 1:2; 6:9-11)**

**SALVATION (2 Tm 2:10)**

All these blessings are "in Christ." Therefore, in order for one to have access to these blessings, he or she must be in Christ. We must clearly understand that one cannot be saved without having these blessings from God. In fact, the summation of all these blessings is salvation. This is why Paul wrote, "*Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, so that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*" (2 Tm 2:10). In order to receive the blessings that are in Christ, one must be immersed into Christ.

Satan will do his best to keep people outside Christ. If his head is crushed under the foot of the gospel of Jesus, then he will do all that is

necessary in order not to be crushed. Therefore, since one is redeemed by the blood of Jesus when he is in Christ, then certainly we must assume that Satan will deceive people into believing that one can be redeemed outside Christ. Since one is not in a state of condemnation in Christ, then we must also assume that Satan will deceive people into believing that they are not in a state of condemnation outside Christ. In order for Satan to accomplish this great deception, he must work with religious people who do not have a love of the truth (See 2 Th 2:10-12). God will allow such people to be deceived. He will allow them to be deceived because all people must be held accountable for their own conduct and unwillingness to obey the word of God.

## **B. One is baptized into Christ.**

Since the preceding point is true, then we must determine when one comes into Christ. In Romans 6:3 this entrance is clearly stated: *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death?”* Paul also stated in Galatians 3:27, *“For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.”* Therefore, if one desires to be in Christ where lie all spiritual blessings concerning his salvation, **then he must obey the gospel.**

According to 2 Timothy 2:10, salvation, and thus all spiritual blessings, are in Christ. Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3 teach that one is baptized into Christ. Therefore, one is baptized into Christ in order to be saved. This one thought is true of all the spiritual blessings that are mentioned to be in Christ. The final conclusion would be that immersion into Christ is absolutely necessary in order to bring one into a saving relationship with Jesus.

The metaphor “in Christ” conveys a fundamental teaching of the New Testament. One must have a covenant relationship with Jesus in order to enjoy the spiritual blessings that result from the sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God on the cross. In order to come into this covenant relationship, we must be crucified **with** Christ (Rm 6:6; see Gl 2:20; Cl 3:3). We must die **with** Christ (Cl 3:3; 2 Tm 2:11). We must be buried **with** Christ (Rm 6:4,5; Cl 2:12). We must be raised **with** Christ (Rm

6:4,5; Cl 3:1). In other words, we must obey the gospel by immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins in order to come into a covenant relationship with the Son of God. In this “in Christ” covenant we are within the realm of God’s saving grace.

Since all spiritual blessings are in Christ, and one is baptized into Christ, then we can understand why the New Testament places so much emphasis on immersion into Christ. We can understand why the “one baptism” is listed in Ephesians 4:4-6 among other fundamental teachings as “one God,” “one Lord,” “one body,” “one faith,” “one Spirit” and “one hope.” The “one baptism” brings us into a covenant relationship with God in the body of Christ, and thus, brings to life the “one hope” of being resurrected to eternal life when Jesus comes again. Therefore, anyone who would deny the fact that baptism is essential to one’s salvation has played into the hand of Satan, and thus, accomplished Satan’s work to keep people outside Christ.

The truly unfortunate thing about this is the fact that thousands of religiously sincere people throughout the world are being deceived by uninformed religious leaders. They are being deceived into believing that one does not have to join with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. We must remember that Satan is working “*with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved*” (2 Th 2:10).

## Chapter 7

### BAPTISM AND RELATIONSHIPS

There is a relational connection established in God’s gospel plan of salvation between Himself and all those who obey the gospel. This gospel connection will eventually result in eternal salvation for all those who respond to the gospel. It is this relational connection that is established as a covenant bond.

In order to initiate this covenant relationship, a positive response to the gospel is God’s condition for people to demonstrate their will-

ingness to live by the gospel. A response to the gospel is necessary because our response through baptism into Christ is a manifestation that we are responding to the heart of God that was revealed on the cross through the incarnate Son of God.

The very fact that we must respond to God infers that salvation is conditional. God would not reveal the gospel to us, and then leave us in question concerning our response to the gospel. God would not tease us with something so great, that we would have to determine our own manner by which we would respond to the cross of Son. In order to connect with God, therefore, we must take the initiative to act on what God has said in His word that we must do in order to be brought into a saving covenant relationship with Him. This is our objective response to the gospel. We read how to respond in His word.

God has clearly revealed the conditions by which we establish a covenant relationship with Him. He has revealed the gospel that is His power to make this connection. Therefore, men and women must be obedient to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus in baptism in order to establish a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus responded to our sin problem through the cross. We must respond to the gospel of the cross by our own death and burial **with** Him (Rm 6:3-6). Jesus brought into the world a solution for our physical death problem. He was resurrected in order to give us hope (Hb 2:14,15). His resurrection resulted from His own death and burial. Our resurrection from the grave of water is the result of death and burial. If there is no death and burial, then there can be no resurrection into a covenant relationship with God. Subsequently, there can be no physical resurrection to eternal life when Jesus comes again, for only those who are in Christ will be raised to life (1 Co 15:22).

Baptism brings us into this relationship of hope with the Lord Jesus Christ. To be “of Christ” means to belong to Him. It means to be of His heritage and to be in a covenant relationship with Jesus as the Son of God. Those who are not “of Christ” cannot be in this saved relationship with God. A covenant relationship with God is reserved only for those who have responded to the heart of God in their obedience to the



gospel of His grace. This is the foundation upon which the Holy Spirit revealed through Paul the concepts of 1 Corinthians 1.

### A. We are baptized to be “of Christ.”

In 1 Corinthians 1:12,13 Paul stated,

*Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I am of Apollos,’ and ‘I am of Cephas,’ and ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? **Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?***

Since the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote had already obeyed the gospel, he asked these Christians two questions in order to encourage them to respond with answers they already knew. What he was asking was that two things must happen before one can be either of Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Christ.

1. The one to whom allegiance is given must have been **crucified** on behalf of the individual who is giving the allegiance (1 Co 1:13).
2. The individual who is giving allegiance **must be baptized into the name** of the one who was crucified on his behalf (1 Co 1:13).

In reference to the first point, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is the One who has been crucified for us (Rm 5:6-8; 2 Co 5:14; 1 Th 5:10). He was crucified for all who would give allegiance to Him. Neither Paul, Apollos nor Cephas had been crucified for alien sinners. Therefore, this first act that is necessary for one to be **of Christ** (that is, “Christian”) has already been accomplished. Jesus has been crucified. He has been crucified for us. This was God’s part to bring us into a covenant relationship with Him. The first part of what is necessary for us to be of Christ, and thus Christian, was accomplished by God when He poured out His grace on the cross through Jesus (Ti 2:11).

The second point of 1 Corinthians 1:13 must be accomplished by those who believe on Jesus. They must respond to the gospel. Alien

sinner are not baptized in the name of either Paul, Apollos or Cephas. **They are baptized in the name of Jesus** (See At 2:38; 19:1-6). Therefore, in order for one to be “of Christ,” **he or she must be baptized in the name of Christ**. Therefore, one cannot become the heritage of Christ without being baptized.

This conclusion brings us again to an irrefutable truth. This truth is that baptism is absolutely necessary in order to be “of Christ.” Without baptism in the name of Christ, one cannot be “of Christ,” and thus, be considered “Christian.”

## **B. One must be baptized in the “name of Christ.”**

When those on Pentecost in Acts 2 were cut to the heart by the message of the gospel that Jesus was the Savior of the world, Peter responded that they must “*be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*” (At 2:38). After Paul had discovered that some disciples in Ephesus had been baptized for the wrong reasons, these disciples were “*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 19:5).

The phrase “in the name of” refers to being associated with the authority of the one with whom one identifies himself by name. If someone sent us on a mission “in his name,” then we would go by the authority of the name of the one who sent us. If someone sent us to the bank with the endorsement of his name in order to withdraw money on his account, then the money would come from the account of the one whose name is on the bank account. If we are to go forth with the great commission of Jesus, then we must go forth under the authority of Jesus’ name. In fact, our entire Christian life is based on our association with the name of Jesus. Paul wrote, “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Cl 3:17).

In order for one to go forth in the name of Jesus, he must have been baptized into the name of Jesus. In order for one to identify himself with the authority of Jesus, **he or she must be baptized**. In order for one’s works to be sanctioned by Christ, one must have been baptized into the name of Christ. One cannot claim the name of Jesus unless he has submitted to the gospel by immersion into the name of

**Jesus. All those who are claiming the name of Jesus without having been baptized into His name are actually plagiarizing the name of Jesus in an attempt to validate their religiosity without obedience to the gospel.**

At the time one is baptized under the authority of the name of Jesus, he or she is at the same time baptized into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus emphasized this when He gave the great commission to the apostles in Matthew 28:19. They were to go forth, “*baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*” If the one who goes forth has not first been baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then he has no right to go forth preaching a message that people be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **C. *Eis* and *en* have different meanings.**

When the New Testament states that one is to be baptized **in** the name of Jesus, a different Greek word is used than the one that is used in Matthew 28:19 where Jesus instructed the apostles to baptize people “*in [eis] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

The Greek word *eis* in Matthew 28:19 refers to being baptized into a **relationship** with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is what happens when people are baptized in (*eis*) the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, when one is baptized in (*en*) the name of Jesus, a different Greek word is used. It is the word *en*. This word refers to one being baptized under the authority or sanction of King Jesus. When one is baptized in (*en*) the name of King Jesus, reference is to **being baptized under the authority of the reigning King Jesus.**

When one is baptized into (*eis*) the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reference is to **one coming into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** In either situation, **one must be baptized.** Without baptism, therefore, one cannot come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is sanctioned by the reigning King Jesus.

We must mention in this context that Jesus is not commanding in

Matthew 28:19 that something be said at the time one is baptized. In other words, He is not saying that the one baptizing should state, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” On the contrary, what Jesus does teach in Matthew 28:19 is that **something is happening** at the moment one is baptized. When one is baptized, he or she is being baptized into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one who is to be baptized should know this **before** he or she is baptized. In other words, being baptized into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is something that must be taught to disciples who would be baptized. They must be taught before the time of baptism. This is not something that is pronounced immediately before one goes down into the grave of water.

In Matthew 28:19 Jesus is not giving a command for some formal and legal statement that is to be made by the one assisting in the baptizing. What Jesus is stating is that something that the one being baptized should already know by the time he or she is baptized. In fact, the one who is baptized is actually doing such because he or she seeks to be baptized into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In response to King Jesus, the one being baptized is responding to the gospel reign of the King (See 2 Co 4:15). Our baptism, therefore, is a manifestation to our friends that we are submitting to the kingdom reign of King Jesus over all things. The affirmation of Matt 28:19 was made by Jesus in the context that as King He had authority over all things. Because He had authority over all things as King of kings, He gave the command to go forth and preach His gospel reign (Mt 28:18). Those who responded to King Jesus, therefore, were submitting to His kingship and announcing to the world that there was a new King in their lives.

#### **D. We are baptized into the body of Christ.**

Being “of Christ” refers to belonging to Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus have submitted to His reign in their lives and to His leadership

as their King. Jesus is the head of the body, and as the head of the body, He controls the lives of the obedient through His word (Jn 12:48; Ep 5:23; Cl 1:18). As King of kings and Lord of lords, He reigns over our lives. But also, because He is King over all things, we reign in life with Him (Rm 5:17).

In order to become a part of the body of Christ of submitted subjects, one must be immersed into the body. When Jesus comes again, He will save out of the world for heaven only His body of submitted subjects. Therefore, it is necessary that one be a part of His body at the time of His final coming.

**1. *Jesus is the Savior of the body of submitted subjects.*** The New Testament teaches that Jesus is the Savior of the body, the church. He *“is the head of the church; and He is **the savior of the body**”* (Ep 5:23). He gave Himself for His body *“that He might sanctify it ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing”* (Ep 5:26,27). Jesus purchased the subjects of His body *“with His own blood”* (At 20:28). He will eternally save only this blood-bought body when He comes again.

**2. *We are baptized into the body of Christ.*** The New Testament teaches that the body is the church. Paul wrote, *“He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church”* (Cl 1:18). Paul even emphasized that Jesus is the *“head over all things to the church”* (Ep 1:22).

One comes into this body by immersion. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:13, *“For by one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondservants or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit”* (See At 2:41,47). It is not that the Holy Spirit has baptized us into the body of Christ. On the contrary, what Paul meant in this statement was that by the members’ submission to the direction of the one Spirit to be baptized, all have become one body in Christ. People may submit to other spirits, but the direction of the Holy Spirit through the inspired word of God will only result in people coming into the one body of Christ.

It must be concluded from the preceding two major points that

only those who have been immersed into the body of Christ will be delivered from this world when Jesus comes again. This corresponds with what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:10, Galatians 3:27 and 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. It was in these passages that Paul said that salvation is “in Christ,” and one comes into Christ only through obedience to the gospel.

Salvation is in the body. One is baptized into Christ, that is, he is baptized into the body of Christ. It is necessary, therefore, that everyone be immersed in order to come into the body of Christ that will be saved out of this world when Jesus comes again.

In order for one to be of Christ, he or she must be baptized in the name of King Jesus. Without baptism in the name of King Jesus, no one can truly represent the authority of Jesus in his or her life. Those who are not baptized in the name of Christ are only counterfeiting their claim to be subjects of King Jesus. How can one preach by the authority of King Jesus over all things if he or she has not first submitted to the authority of King Jesus through baptism? Religious people may do good deeds in the name of Christ, but if they have not obeyed the gospel by submission in baptism to the reign of King Jesus, then they fall short of what the Bible defines as being “of Christ.”

Some have stolen from the Bible the name “Christian,” and thus gone forth to represent King Jesus with whom they have not been crucified, buried and resurrected through baptism. In order to claim allegiance to the King, and thus, represent the King throughout the world, one must have proclaimed his or her allegiance to the King through obedience to the gospel.

## Chapter 8

### **BAPTISM AND COVENANT RELATIONS WITH GOD**

Throughout history God has maintained a covenant relationship with His people. He established a covenant with Noah after the flood of Noah’s day (Gn 6:18). He established a covenant with Abraham (Gn

15:18). He established a covenant with the nation of Israel (Rm 9:4). God relates with His people through covenant relationships in order to bring about His eternal purpose to bring the obedient into eternal dwelling with Him. The covenants of God have always been a central part of His plan to reveal the gospel of redemption through the Son of God.

Those with whom God establishes a covenant relationship will be saved for eternal dwelling if they maintain the conditions of the covenant that He establishes with them. In establishing salvational covenant relationships, God has always placed conditions on the continuation of the covenant that men must keep. In other words, no covenant relationship with God is without conditions. God is not a respecter of persons, and thus, He does not establish a covenant relationship with anyone apart from the faith of those with whom He establishes a covenant. It must also be noted that He has never established a covenant relationship with an unbeliever.

Baptism in the name of Jesus for remission of sins is the initiation of the new covenant with those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God. As a result of our faith, we indicate by immersion that we desire to join in a covenant relationship with God through Jesus. All who would come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, therefore, must be immersed in water for remission of sins as an expression of faith. Baptism washes away the sins that separate one from a covenant with God. Baptism brings us into contact with the continual cleansing of sins by the blood of Jesus that is the primary blessing of our covenant with God (1 Jn 1:7).

Before the cross of Jesus, God had a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. Jews were physically born into this covenant relationship that was established at Mount Sinai. As they grew up after birth, Jewish children were then instructed concerning the covenant that God had with the nation of Israel at Sinai. However, this covenant would eventually change to a new covenant that would demand a different manner by which God would establish His gospel covenant with believers.

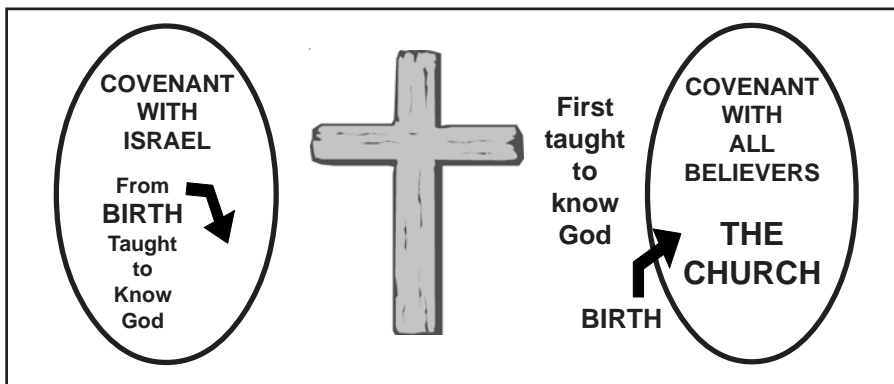
In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God stated that He would establish a **new covenant** with the houses of Israel and Judah, which covenant would include all nations. Conditions for entering into this new covenant



would be different from the old Sinai covenant. Notice carefully in the following prophecy of Jeremiah to Israel the nature of this new covenant relationship that God would establish:

*<sup>31</sup>Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup>not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord. <sup>33</sup>But this will be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be My people. <sup>34</sup>And they will no longer teach every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.*

In verse 33 God explained that the new covenant would be different in the sense that He would put His law in their hearts. In other words, when one would come into a covenant relationship with Him under the new covenant, the law of God would already be in one's heart in the sense that he or she would know the conditions of the covenant **before** coming into the covenant relationship. **One would already have been taught to know God before coming into a covenant relationship with God.**



Before one is born again by obedience to the gospel, He is taught to “know God” and that which is necessary to come into a covenant relationship with God. In knowing God, one must understand the heart of God that was poured out on the cross. Before coming into the new covenant, one is taught what God did for him through the offering of His Son, and thus those who are baptized into Christ do such in response to the heart of God (See Jn 6:45). One is first taught the gospel. It is then one’s gospel response becomes the condition for one to establish a new covenant relationship with God in the name of Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when He instructed the apostles to first disciple a person to Jesus before baptizing them (See Mt 28:19,20).

Under the new covenant one continues to live in response to the gospel, and thus his or her gospel living is the continued condition for remaining in a covenant relationship with God. Paul explained this in the following statement:

*If you then were raised with Christ [from the waters of baptism], seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting [and reigning] at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Cl 3:1,2).*

Paul then added what we should do in response to the gospel reign of King Jesus: “*Put to death your members that are on the earth ... put on the new man*” (Cl 3:5,10).

When a Jewish baby was born under the old Sinai covenant, he or she was automatically in a covenant relationship with God. Physical birth of Jewish parents brought one into a covenant relationship with God because the nation of Israel as a whole was already in a covenant with God. When the small child grew up, he or she had to be taught to be obedient to the Sinai law. The child had to be taught what to do in order to maintain a covenant relationship with God. However, under the new covenant, once one has responded to the gospel, one thus continues to live by the motivation of the gospel of the heart of God that was revealed on the cross.

Under the new covenant one must first be taught the gospel before

he is motivated to respond to the gospel, and thus establish a covenant with God. This is certainly the thought behind Jesus' statement of John 6:45: *"It is written in the prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Therefore, everyone who has **heard and learned** from the Father comes to Me."* When one is taught the gospel of Jesus and His present kingdom reign, his response should be the same as those in Acts 2 who heard, *"God has made this same Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (At 2:36). *"Now when they heard this, **they were cut to the heart**"* (At 2:37). Those on Pentecost were taught the gospel by the inspired preaching of the apostles. They responded to what they were taught. In response to what they asked they should do, Peter instructed them, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you"* (At 2:38).

About three thousand people came into a covenant relationship with the Father on that day of Pentecost when they were immersed for the remission of their sins (At 2:41). Therefore, they were first taught through Peter and the apostles, and then, they came into a covenant relationship with God through obedience to the gospel.

Both in the covenant God had established with Israel before the cross, and in His covenant with all believers today, there has been remission of sins. When one is in a covenant relationship with God there is always remission. Remission of sins under both the old and new covenants was accomplished through the same thing, the blood of Jesus. The Hebrew writer reminded those Jewish Christians to whom he wrote,

*And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions committed under the first covenant**, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance* (Hb 9:15; see Rm 3:25).

Since under the old covenant it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin, the sacrifices of the old covenant were only a shadow of the cross that was to come (Hb 10:1-4). Therefore, when Jesus offered Himself on the cross, He became the blood offering for all men who have been in a covenant relationship with God throughout all history.

With the above in mind, we must review again some of the following concepts that are taught in the New Testament. Understanding the nature of the covenant relationship that God's people now have with Him helps us understand New Testament teachings concerning covenant relationships:

### **A. Remission of sins *before* the cross of Jesus:**

Before the cross, remission of sins through the sacrifices of bulls and goats did occur in the life of the obedient as a direct result of animal sacrifices. However, remission did take place in view of the coming sacrifice of Jesus. The primary conditions for salvation that were established by God for remission of sins has always been the same throughout history. On God's part, salvation has been by grace, for no person can keep God's laws perfectly in order to save himself (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16); neither can good works atone for sin. On man's part, the condition has been faith, that is, trusting in God's grace (Rm 1:17; Hb 4:2). However, faith must be expressed in some way, for the demons also believe and tremble, and yet they are not saved (Js 2:19). Therefore, under the Sinai covenant God's part in the Israelite's salvation was the same as it is today. Salvation was and is by grace.

Our part is also the same. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31). Our belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ must motivate us to respond to the gospel of God's grace. Our faith in Jesus is the first condition that God has established in order for one to establish and maintain a covenant relationship with Him. Our response to the gospel is God's condition for remission of sins. This condition is different today than under the Sinai law.

**1. *Remission of sins came from the cross under the Sinai law:*** Under the Sinai covenant, man's response to God was obedience to His will. It was in response to God's will to offer animal sacrifices that forgiveness was realized. However, since the days God instituted blood sacrifices, it was "*not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*" (Hb 10:4). Animal sacrifices could not make perfect

the Jews who lived under the Sinai law (Hb 10:1). Nevertheless, the Israelites had to offer the sacrifices in compliance with the Sinai law.

The animal sacrifices were a shadow of the sacrifice of Jesus that was to come. Of the sacrifice of Jesus, Paul wrote in Romans 3:25,

*Whom [Jesus] God set forth to be an atoning sacrifice by His blood, through faith in order to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins in the past because of the forbearance of God* (Rm 3:25; see Hb 9:15).

When Jesus died on the cross, He completed the Father's plan of forgiveness for those who lived under the Sinai covenant. Romans 3:25 is not teaching that the sins committed before the cross were "rolled forward" in order to be forgiven at the cross. **Before the cross, sins were forgiven in view of the cross.**

Because God is timeless, and not confined to time as we are, He sees or deals with history as a whole. The sacrifice of Jesus had to be a historical event that had to take place at a specific time in history. In other words, Jesus could not have been offered continually upon the cross at many different times throughout history. Because God entered into the confinement of time through the incarnation, a specific time in man's history had to be chosen when the onetime sacrifice would be made. That time was in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem of Palestine.

Since Jesus was incarnate Deity in the flesh of man, He was confined to man's time while on earth (Ph 2:5-8). Therefore, His crucifixion had to be a historical event according to the calendar of man. However, the sacrificial blood of the cross was not something that was confined to time. Though the cross had to happen at a specific time in history, the application of the blood of Jesus did not. For this reason, God can easily apply the blood of Jesus to those who lived before this historical event, as well as to those who live after the event.

Simply because the faithful in the Old Testament era had no knowledge of the coming sacrifice of Jesus, did not mean that Jesus' blood was not working in their lives. We must remember that the forgiveness of sins through the blood of the sacrificial Son of God is God's work,

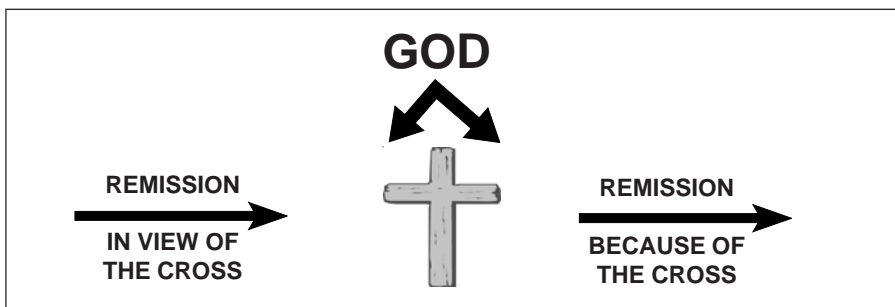
not man's. And God is not confined to time, as is man. He sees and works in our history on a timeless basis.

God forgave the sins of all the faithful of all history through the cross. He sees all the sins of mankind in all history through the cross. Without the cross, there would have been no forgiveness of sins before or after the cross. At the time the incarnate Son of God was crucified, God saw all the sins of humanity both **before** and **after** the cross.

Paul stated in Romans 1:17, "*The just will live by faith.*" Romans 1:17 is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in the Old Testament. Thus the justified lived by faith **before** the cross as we live by faith **after** the cross. God's response to forgive sins is conditioned upon man's faith both before and after the cross.

In some way this may help us to understand why Jesus said on the cross, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" (Mt 27:46). Jesus took upon Himself on the cross all the sins of all humanity of all history. All the sins of those before the cross and all the sins of all those after the cross, were upon Him at the cross. Could it be that it was in the nature of God in whom is no darkness (1 Jn 1:5) to turn away from such darkness of sin? Though we do not understand all that transpired in the heavenly realm at that moment on the cross, we do know that in some way Jesus took it upon Himself to accept the burden of all the sins of those who have obediently responded to God by faith.

For us today, the cross was God's manifestation of His grace in reference to sins in the past that carries forgiveness forward to us in the present (Ti 2:11). This is why the Hebrew writer made the following statement in Hebrews 9:15 concerning Jesus being our Mediator:



*And for this reason He [Jesus] is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant**, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

The cross is God's manifestation of grace to those who would sin after Jesus died on the cross (Ep 2:6-9). All forgiveness of sins, therefore, centers around and proceeds from Calvary. Forgiveness occurs instantly in the life of the believer upon the believer's compliance to the conditions for forgiveness that God demands at any time in history. Before the cross, the Israelites had to keep the Sinai law as a manifestation of faith. Today, we must continue to live in response to the gospel.

Since those before the cross had no idea of the revelation of the mystery of the gospel, the condition for their maintaining a covenant relationship with God was through obedience to law. But it is different with the Christian. The Christian is "*not under law, but under grace*" (Rm 6:14). Christians are under the gospel of grace, and thus must respond in their lives to the grace of God that was revealed through the incarnate Son of God. Because we know the awesome gospel of grace that was revealed through the Son of God, we need no law by which to live, for we willingly respond obediently to grace.

We must keep in mind, however, that perfect submission to all of God's law is not a condition for salvation simply because no individual can keep God's law perfectly. No one can be saved by perfect law-keeping (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). And because we cannot, God must save us by His grace that was revealed at the cross of Calvary (Ti 2:11). Christians thus walk by faith in the grace of God, not according to whether they have obeyed law perfectly.

**2. Remission of sins comes directly from Jesus:** The conditions for the remission of sins were different **before** the ascension of Jesus and establishment of the new covenant, than **after** the establishment of the new covenant. Before the new covenant, and while on this earth, Jesus could say during His personal ministry, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Lk 7:48,49). He said such in Matthew 9:6: "*But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.*"



Jesus could forgive sins personally while on this earth because He was the incarnation of God against whom sin was committed. Therefore, **before** His death, He could say to the thief on the cross, “*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*” (Lk 23:43). While on this earth, Jesus could forgive sins personally, and thus, He could directly save the thief on the cross. His power to forgive sins was evidence that He was God on earth, for only God can forgive sins.

One must also keep in mind that the Sinai law was still in force during Jesus’ life on earth. The new covenant was brought into force only after the official announcement of the lordship of Jesus in Acts 2 (See At 2:36; Hb 9:16,17). Under the Sinai law the conditions for forgiveness of sins were different from the conditions for forgiveness under the new covenant. Jesus, as God and originator of the Sinai law, had authority to forgive sins personally on earth while that law was in force. Now that He has ascended to the right hand of God, He continues to forgive sins through His blood, but only on the condition that one has responded to the gospel (1 Jn 1:7).

**3. Remission of sins was accomplished by John’s baptism:** During the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus, God ordained by commandment that John baptize people **for the forgiveness of sins**. He did this in order to prepare people to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus after the cross. Therefore, John baptized in the wilderness and preached the “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mk 1:4).

John’s baptism was a baptism **for the remission of sins**. The same Greek phrase that is used in Mark 1:4 is also used in Acts 2:38 where Peter instructed people to be baptized “*for the remission of sins.*” The difference is that the baptism of Acts 2:38 was to be **in the name of Jesus**, that is, in response to Jesus’ lordship for He had already died and ascended by the time of the pronouncement of Acts 2:38.

Though John’s baptism was for the forgiveness of sins, his baptism was replaced by the baptism of Acts 2:38 when the new covenant was established in Acts 2 with all those who submitted to baptism in the name of Jesus (At 2:41). If any were baptized by John’s baptism after Acts 2, then they needed to be rebaptized. Such happened in Acts

19 when Paul rebaptized about twelve disciples in Ephesus who had previously be baptized with John's baptism (At 19:1-7).

## **B. Remission of sins *after* the cross:**

**After** His death, Jesus' new covenant was brought into force, "*for a covenant is ratified upon death*" (Hb 9:16,17). **After** His death, therefore, when the new covenant was in force, Jesus' disciples preached **baptism for the remission of sins** (At 2:38; 8:12,13,35-39; 10:48; 22:16). Therefore, the conditions for salvation were different **before** the cross and the establishment of the church than they were after the official announcement of kingdom reign of Jesus on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. The conditions for remission before the cross differed from what is necessary for remission under the new covenant of Christ today.

Jesus could personally forgive sins while on earth when He was living under the Sinai law. Those who lived before the cross were also under the Sinai law. But that law was taken away at the cross when the new covenant came into force in Acts 2 with the first official "reading" of the testament of the Testator who was at that time reigning in heaven (See Cl 2:14).

Today, Christians are not under the Sinai law or covenant (Rm 7:4). They are under a law and covenant that says everyone must be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19,20) for the remission of sins (At 2:38). In order to come into Christ (Rm 6:3), or be of Christ today (1 Co 1:12-15), we must obey the gospel. Baptism for remission of sins is thus necessary in order to establish a covenant with God today. If anyone would be submissive to the reign of King Jesus, he or she must be baptized into a covenant relationship with Him.

Jesus' blood has now become the "*blood of the covenant*" (Mt 26:28). His blood is the sacrificial blood of the new covenant that has now been established between God and those who are obedient to the conditions of the covenant. Those who respond to the gospel that they have been taught, come into this new covenant relationship with God

wherein they have forgiveness through the blood of the new covenant. The sins that would separate God's covenanted people from Him are continually washed away by the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:7).

## Chapter 9

### BAPTISM AND SALVATION

For many years the argument has been made that baptism stands between one being in a state of condemnation or a state of salvation. This simple approach to emphasize the importance of baptism, therefore, has not lost its importance as a significant obedience on the part of those who believe. In every case of conversion in the New Testament, immersion stands as the point of reference between being in a state of condemnation and a state of salvation. Bible students who ignore this fact have overlooked a very important point concerning the conversion records of the New Testament.

If baptism is not important in reference to one's salvation, then we would assume that there would be little attention paid to it in the conversion cases that are recorded in the New Testament. However, if baptism does stand as a place of great importance in reference to one's salvation, **then we would assume that it would be emphasized by the Holy Spirit in the records of conversion that are in the New Testament.** What is recorded in the cases of conversion is that all salvational blessings came after one was baptized.

#### A. **Baptism stands between being saved and being lost.**

Paul wrote that *"our old man was crucified"* with Jesus and that *"we are buried with Him through baptism into death"* (Rm 6:4-6). After baptism one walks *"in newness of life"* (Rm 6:4). Jesus said that *"unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (Jn 3:3-5).


Before one comes into Christ, he or she is **outside** Christ. How-

ever, Paul wrote, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gl 3:27). Before baptism, therefore, one is without Christ. But after baptism one is “*of Christ*” (1 Co 1:12,13). One is baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3). Before baptism, one is in a state of unregeneration. After baptism, however, one is in a state of regeneration. Paul wrote, “*According to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Ti 3:5). **Baptism, therefore, stands between either being in a condition of salvation or in a state of condemnation in relation to God.**

One cannot change the preceding truths concerning the importance of adult baptism. Throughout the New Testament these concepts are affirmed, and thus, in order to have a good conscience before God concerning those things that God demands of us, one must be immersed for the remission of sins. This is the right thing to do in response to the love of God that was revealed through the sacrificial offering of His only begotten Son.

**B. Baptism saves one’s soul.**

Those things that result from baptism are those things that pertain to one’s salvation. Peter said that one must “*be baptized for the remission of sins*” (At 2:38). Remission of sins is here stated to come **after** baptism. Ananias urged Paul to “*be baptized, and wash away your sins*” (At 22:16). The washing of sins comes at the point of baptism. Peter adds that baptism “*now saves us*” (1 Pt 3:21). Peter is saying that salvation comes at the point of baptism. This is true, not because there is any power in the water, but because this is the point in time at

<p><b>Old Man</b>  <b>Outside Christ</b>  <b>Without Christ</b>  <b>Not of Christ</b>  <b>Unregenerate</b>  <b>Unwashed</b>  <b>No Remission</b>  <b>Not Saved</b>  <b>Under Condemnation</b></p>		<p><b>New Man</b>  <b>Inside Christ</b>  <b>Put on Christ</b>  <b>Of Christ</b>  <b>Regenerated</b>  <b>Washed</b>  <b>Remission of Sins</b>  <b>Saved</b>  <b>No Condemnation</b></p>	<p>(Romans 6:4,5)          (Romans 6:3)          (Galatians 3:27)          (1 Corinthians 1:12,13)          (Titus 3:5)          (Acts 22:16)          (Acts 2:38)          (1 Peter 3:21)          (Mark 16:16)</p>
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which one contacts the saving blood of Jesus.

Jesus stated that one is saved at the point of baptism. In Mark 16:16 He said, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” The *New American Standard Version* translated Mark 16:16 thus, “*He who has believed and has been baptized will be saved.*” Salvation, therefore, comes at the point of baptism, not before.

### C. **Baptism is a cause for rejoicing:**

Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that “*as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death*” (Rm 6:3; See Gl 3:27). The “into Christ” and “into His death” are things that take place at the point of baptism. One is not in Christ before he is baptized into Christ. One has not been baptized into the death of Christ until he has been baptized.

From the teachings of these passages it is obvious that immersion stands between some very important things concerning one’s salvation. If immersion stands between condemnation and salvation, then we must conclude that it is necessary for our salvation.

The things mentioned above are blessings that result from immersion. These blessings are not present in the life of the unbaptized person. It is because these things take place **at the point of baptism** that the eunuch rejoiced **after** he was baptized in Acts 8. The Scriptures state that Philip “*baptized him ... and the eunuch ... went on his way rejoicing*” (At 8:38,39). The eunuch could rejoice because of what happened as a result of his obedience to the gospel. There was no reason to rejoice before he was baptized because remission of sins and salvation were blessings in his life that came only after obedience to the gospel in baptism. The same is true of us today. Only after we are baptized is there reason for rejoicing.

### D. **Baptism is not a self-proclamation of one’s salvation.**

It may be that the simplicity of this point is what confuses people.

Anyone who studies the cases of conversion in the New Testament can clearly understand the relationship newly immersed believers had with God. The contrast between their behavior before and after immersion is quite evident. It is surprising to see the lengths to which individuals will go in order to explain away this most obvious fact of the New Testament surrounding baptism.

We can understand that if one has traditionally denied the importance of immersion for years, it is hard to change in the face of clear teachings of the Bible and the intimidation of fellow religionists. One's religious heritage is often stronger than Bible truth. Therefore, we must not underestimate the power of traditional thought over the minds of men. After all, Jesus said, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9). Most people will usually consider traditional religious heritage more binding than the law of God.

### **E. Baptism is not a legal act of obedience.**

We must remind ourselves that because baptism stands between condemnation and salvation, it is not a legal act of obedience whereby God is obligated to save the one who is baptized. In other words, one does not put God in debt by obedience to the gospel through the action of immersion. The action of immersion does not save. Immersion is not a meritorious work whereby we earn God's salvation or put God in debt to save us. We must remember that by works of law no one can be saved (Rm 3:20). This is true when alien sinners come to God simply because no one can save himself.

However, we must keep in mind that one cannot be saved without an obedient faith response to the gospel of God's grace. In other words, **one cannot be saved by ignoring or rejecting what God says one must do in order to wash away sins**. He cannot because obedience is the alien sinner's response to God's grace. It is by our positive response to the gospel that God's will is established in our lives (Rm 3:31).

## **F. Baptism is a visible response to the gospel.**

The point of baptism is the time in the sinner's life where God says that He will apply the blood of Jesus to one's soul. Baptism is an action of immersion in water on earth that is visible to those who would witness our response to the gospel. However, the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus is something that takes place in the spiritual realm in our relationship with God through Jesus. Therefore, the action of baptism is more for our benefit in the sense that we have a point of reference where we can affirm that God responded in the spiritual realm in order to forgive our sins. Baptism is our witness before men and God that we accept the conditions of God to establish a covenant with Him. This would answer our questions concerning why God instituted that at the point of baptism we could be assured of our salvation.

God could forgive our sins at any time in our lives. Some have led themselves to believe that an emotional "salvation experience," or a confession of "receiving of Jesus," is the point at which God forgives sins. However, these are man generated and self-proclaimed points of reference. They are subjective in that they are subject to our self-proclamation of our own salvation. We must not forget, however, that anything that would depend on the emotions or intellect of man would not suffice in order to activate the work of God in the heavenly realm. The work of a "sinner's prayer" is not sufficient because such originates from man and not God. Only God has the right to declare who is saved. **And we can only know His declaration of our salvation by what we objectively read in the New Testament.**

Baptism is God's declaration of our salvation. From the revelation of the Scriptures we discover that God has said He will forgive sins at the point of immersion in water. Therefore, when one is baptized, his confidence for his or her salvation does not originate in some personal emotional experience wherein one claims his own salvation. His confidence is in God who says in His word that He will forgive our sins if we would simply respond to the cross through immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism is thus an action of



trusting (faith) in God to unleash the saving blood of Jesus on our souls. It is a manifestation of our faith (trust) in the grace of God. It thus reveals our response to the gospel of Jesus.

### **G. Baptism must be a self-initiative response to the gospel.**

In concluding this point, it would be good to consider again the case wherein Philip shared the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. Many people have presumed their own means by which they claim to be saved. In their presumption to claim salvation for themselves through a “sinner’s prayer,” they have not been told the whole story concerning the experience of salvation that is recorded in the New Testament.

When the eunuch asked Philip concerning the meaning of the text of Isaiah 53 that he was reading, Philip began from this text and preached Jesus unto the eunuch (At 8:34,35). However, when they came to a certain water, it was the eunuch who said, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36).

Since this question of the eunuch mentions the subject of baptism, then we could correctly assume that **the preaching of Jesus includes the teaching of baptism**. Therefore, people today who claim to be saved without baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, have assumed a presumptuous belief. They have founded their salvation on the presumption of their own feelings and inventions, and not the declaration of the word of God. They have thus stopped short of the whole teaching of Jesus, for the one teaching them failed to teach the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins. In their being taught the gospel, the subject of baptism was left out.

The case of the eunuch also illustrates one’s response to the gospel message. No one should be asked to be baptized. The eunuch was not asked to be baptized. He was only instructed about baptism. When about 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost asked what they should do because they had been cut to the heart by the gospel, they were simply instructed to be baptized (At 2:38). The point is that when the gospel is preached, those who respond must take the initiative to do that which is necessary in order to come into a saving relationship with God by hav-

ing their sins washed away. **If one truly understands the gospel, he or she does not have to be asked to obey the gospel by being baptized.** When one realizes the power of the gospel unto salvation, his or her faith should drive them to ask what they must do.

## Chapter 10

# BAPTISM AND LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

Common sense combined with simple logic is sometimes all that is needed to prove a point. When it involves biblical teachings, one's logical approach to form deductions is not the primary foundation upon which fundamental teaching is established. That which is fundamental for salvation is always stated somewhere in the Bible in simple declarative or imperative statements. In other words, nothing that is fundamental for salvation must be concluded through a process of reasoning. When it comes to essential teachings that are necessary for salvation, the Bible simply says what it means and means what it says. However, that which is fundamental to salvation logically follows any deduction of thought that is related to fundamental teachings.

If a clearly stated fundamental truth is made, then that truth must be the premise upon which all figurative passages are to be interpreted that refer to that truth. The truth must be the foundation upon which all passages that refer to the fundamental truth must be based. This is true simply because the Bible does not contradict itself. Therefore, when we study teachings concerning what God requires on man's part in order to be saved, then we must first determine that which is fundamental in reference to man's obedience. What is clearly stated must be our interpretive guide to understand all passages that refer to salvational concepts.

Baptism is first established as a fundamental truth in reference to our salvation by declarative or imperative statements. Mark 16:16 is a declarative statement that makes baptism a fundamental truth that is necessary for salvation. Jesus said, *"He that believes and is baptized*

*will be saved.*” Now when we study other contexts that relate to the salvation of individuals in the first century, we must logically conclude that baptism played an important part in every case of salvation. This is the same with the fundamental truths of belief and repentance. **Though a particular context of a reported case of conversion does not specifically mention all necessary requirements for salvation on the part of an individual, we must conclude from clear statements in other texts that all that is necessary for salvation is assumed in any one case of conversion.** If the Holy Spirit had to state in every single case of conversion all that was necessary on man’s part for salvation, then the New Testament would be a cumbersome volume of redundancy. The Holy Spirit has thus kept it simple, assuming that we can connect all the dots of what is necessary for salvation in all passages that deal with salvation.

The preceding is called a **metonymy**. A metonymy is when a part is stated for the whole. For example, Jesus said, *“He who is baptized will be saved.”* Jesus did not mention in the statement that one must first believe on Him. Neither did He mention repentance. He simply used the one word “baptize” to stand for all that was necessary in order to be saved. If one misses this common use of language in studying the Bible, then he will certainly come to wrong and erroneous conclusions. Nevertheless, such as been the case for many years in the study of baptism.

Since baptism is a fundamental part of one’s salvation, then we can make logical deductions from other texts that state the same salvational conclusion. The following points are logical thoughts which show that baptism is a necessary part of one’s salvation. As we study through these texts, we must keep in mind the use of metonymy when any one word is used to stand for all that is necessary in order to be saved.

Under each of the following major points there are three statements. Statements 1 and 2 are teachings from key scriptures. The third point is true because of the truth of points 1 and 2.

## A. **Baptism is necessary for eternal life.**

It is God's eternal plan to bring obedient people of faith into eternal dwelling in a new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13). In order to accomplish this, God has required of those who would come into His presence certain conditions upon which they would be qualified as candidates for eternal life. In order for any person to come into the eternal presence of God, God requires that we submit to His conditions for eternal dwelling.

1. John states that God has given to us eternal life "*and this life is in His Son*" (1 Jn 5:11). In order to have eternal life, therefore, one must be "in His Son."
2. The New Testament states that the a sinner is baptized into Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*" (Rm 6:3; see Gl 3:27).
3. Therefore, we can logically conclude that one must be **baptized into Jesus, "into His Son," in order to have eternal life.**

## B. **Obedience is necessary for salvation.**

1. Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus became the author of eternal salvation "*to all those who obey Him.*" Thus, Jesus is the "originator" of salvation to all those who are obedient to His will.
2. Baptism is a command of Jesus. "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mk 16:15,16). "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (Jn 3:3).
3. Therefore, we can conclude that one **must obey Jesus' command to be baptized** in order to have "eternal salvation."

## C. **Washing of sin in baptism is necessary for salvation.**

1. Titus 3:5 says that Christians are saved by the mercy of God “*by the washing of regeneration.*” In salvation, therefore, there is regeneration. In this regeneration, we are washed of all sin.
2. In Acts 22:16 Ananias referred Paul to this washing action by stating to him, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins.*”
3. Therefore, we can conclude that one is saved by the washing away of sins in baptism which is the point in one’s life where one is regenerated. Because of this action at the point of baptism, Peter could say of baptism in 1 Peter 3:21 that it does “*now save us.*” This is the washing of regeneration.

#### **D. Baptism is necessary in order to become a new creature.**

1. One can be a new creation, or creature, only in Christ. Paul wrote this in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “*Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.*”
2. The New Testament says that we are baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27).
3. Therefore, we must be **baptized into Christ in order to become a new creation or new creature.** We must be baptized in order to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rm 6:4).

After the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the necessity to be baptized is a logical conclusion in any New Testament context wherein salvation is discussed. One must be immersed into Christ in order to have the blessing of eternal life. One must obey the commands of Jesus in order to be saved. Baptism is one of those commands. In baptism God washes away sin, and thus, one becomes a new creature only after baptism. Baptism is therefore essential for salvation because of logical deductions from clear statements that are made in the Scriptures.

#### **E. Baptism is a salvational point of reference.**

At the risk of being redundant, we would stress again the point

that since the subject of baptism is discussed by the New Testament writers in the context of so many crucial teachings on salvation, that something must be very important about it. Why is baptism discussed in the context of Romans 6 in relation to one being crucified with Christ? Why is baptism discussed in the context of 2 Corinthians 5 when Paul talks about becoming a new creature? These and a host of other salvation contexts contain the subject of baptism. If baptism does not play an important part in one's salvation, then we would wonder why the subject is so often mentioned in those contexts of the New Testament where discussion is centered around one's salvation.

Again, we must reemphasize the fact that when a requirement for salvation is mentioned in any text of the New Testament that would apply to any person after the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, then we must automatically assume that God intends that we fulfill that requirement. Since repentance is mentioned as a necessity on the part of man for salvation in texts wherein neither faith nor baptism are mentioned, then we must assume that repentance is a requirement for salvation even though it is not mentioned in a specific salvational text. If immersion for remission of sins is not mentioned in any passage where repentance or faith are mentioned as requirements for salvation, then we must assume that it is a requirement for salvation because it is clearly stated to be so in other scriptures.

The fact that not all that is necessary for salvation is mentioned by the Holy Spirit in any one text of scripture is evidence that the Holy Spirit commonly used a metonymy in order to teach truth in reference to what is necessary for one's salvation. If a novice student of the Bible misses the use of a metonymy in reference to salvational conditions, then he will make the Bible contradict itself.

When a requirement for salvation is stated alone in any one passage, that does not negate the necessity of other requirements for salvation that are mentioned in other passages. God does not play guessing games with us throughout the New Testament. He does not state in one passage that repentance is necessary while negating the requirement of faith when faith is not specifically mentioned in a salvational passage. He does not negate the requirement of faith when only baptism is men-

tioned. The New Testament must be understood as a whole in determining all that is required by God for the salvation of our souls. No man has a right to extract only that which he likes, for that which he may extract could be that which is necessary for his salvation. And when it comes to extracting things from God's word concerning all that is necessary for salvation, then we are doing what Peter warned concerning those who twist the Scriptures. They do so to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:15,16).

## **Chapter 11**

### **BAPTISM AND RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL**

If baptism is a necessary part of one's response to God in order to be saved, then it would logically follow that we could say that the New Testament connects baptism with other teachings that are fundamental to our salvation. This is true because all that is necessary on our part to be saved must be interconnected. No one essential truth concerning salvation can stand alone. When we study the subject of baptism, therefore, we would assume that if it is necessary for salvation, then it cannot be disconnected from other essentials that are connected with our salvation. We say this to emphasize the fact that baptism cannot be disconnected from the gospel and all that is necessary to bring forgiveness of sins into one's life.

If we also contend that one can be saved without being immersed into a covenant relationship with God, then we are saying that there are some basic New Testament truths that are not important that are inherently connected with baptism. But if one says that these basic New Testament truths are not important, then he is advocating some serious false conclusions. The following are some logical conclusions that manifest some unfortunate exclusions if we maintain the position that baptism is not necessary for salvation:



## A. Logical conclusions concerning baptism:

If one can be saved without obedience to the gospel in baptism, then the following are some conclusions that must be faced. These conclusions lead us to affirm that immersion is directly connected with salvation, and thus, a necessary part of God's plan to bring the alien sinner into a saving covenant relationship with Him.

1. If one is saved without baptism, then he or she can be saved **without obeying Jesus**, for Jesus declared that one is baptized in order to be saved (Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5).

2. If one is saved without baptism, then one can be saved **without obeying the inspired apostles**, for they commanded that one be baptized in order to be saved (At 2:38; 10:47,48).

3. If one is saved without baptism, then one can be saved **without obeying the message of the great commission**, for when Jesus instructed His apostles to evangelize the world, He commanded them to baptize those who believed (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15,16).

4. If one is saved without baptism, then one can be saved **without believing one of the fundamental teachings** of Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6 that there is only "one baptism."

5. If one is saved without baptism, then one can be saved **without following the example of those in the first century who responded to the preaching of the gospel by immersion** for the forgiveness of their sins (At 2:38,41).

6. If one is saved without baptism, then one can be saved **without obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus**, for baptism is obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-5).

7. If one is saved without baptism, then one is saved **without recognizing the importance of baptism** as a fundamental teaching of the New Testament that is mentioned over one hundred times.

Because of the emphasis that is placed on baptism in obedience to the gospel of Jesus, thousands of people in the first century were immersed into Christ. They were immersed because they knew that such

was in obedience to the gospel. Alien sinners today must follow their example. If we desire to restore the faith that was characteristic of the early Christians, then we must teach the response of the early believers who were baptized into the body of Christ (1 Co 12:13). This obedience would include a response to the grace of God that was poured out on the cross (2 Co 4:15). If there is no obedience, then there is no gratitude expressed for what God did through Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

## **B. Examples of responses to the gospel:**

A subtle departure from emphasis on baptism has occurred in most religious groups today concerning the cases of baptism as they are recorded in the document of Acts. This subtle departure has even affected some who formerly believed that baptism was essential to salvation. One reason for this apostasy in belief has been in understanding the New Testament teaching concerning “obedience to the gospel.”

The gospel is the good news of Jesus’ incarnation into the flesh of man, His death for our sins, His burial, His resurrection for our hope, and then ascension and coronation (1 Co 15:1-4). When the gospel was preached in the first century, people **responded** to the message of this good news. Their response was recorded in the book of Acts. Their baptisms were a response to the gospel message that was preached. When they heard the preaching of the gospel, they were touched in their hearts. They responded by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Sometimes an overemphasis has been placed on the response to the gospel (baptism) that often leads to less emphasis being placed on what caused the response, that is, the gospel itself. Some have been taught that one must go through a series of preliminary steps in order to become a Christian. What some propose is the at course on “discipleship” must be concluded before one is allowed to be baptized. Some say that steps are to be completed, that is, one is to hear, believe, repent, confess, and then, be baptized. But these responses are not the gospel. They were recorded in the New Testament and directly con-

nected with obedience to the gospel and salvation. However, these responses of the early believers must not be confused with the gospel. We must not make the responses to the gospel the gospel itself.

In the first century, multitudes of people responded to the preaching of the cross. Their faith in Jesus moved them to respond obediently to Jesus by being crucified, buried and resurrected with Him in baptism. The people heard the gospel. They believed the gospel. They were baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness.

When the gospel is preached today, the same response is generated in the hearts of the people. The response is not the gospel. The gospel causes the response in the hearts of the people today just as it caused a response in the first century.

We must not overemphasize the response to the gospel to the exclusion of the gospel. One can teach others to hear, believe, repent, confess, and then present baptism as a legal act of obedience without ever mentioning the gospel of the cross of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope. One can actually persuade people to hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized without ever mentioning the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection. In our preaching, therefore, we must focus the minds of the people on the gospel of Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation, and then His final revelation from heaven.

Paul said to the Corinthians, "*I delivered to you **first of all** that which I also received*" (1 Co 15:3). What he had received was that "*Christ **died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, and that He was **buried**, and that He **rose again** on the third day according to the Scriptures*" (1 Co 15:3,4). **This is the core of the gospel!** In every major sermon of Acts some event of the gospel was recorded in reference to the preaching of the gospel. When sincere people heard of the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross for their sins, His resurrection for their hope of eternal life, and His present kingdom reign, they listened and believed. And finally, they repented and were immersed in order to be saved.

What has often happened today is that we have overemphasized the response to the gospel to the point of losing our focus on the gospel

itself. But we must never forget that our obsession must always be on the suffering Servant of God on the cross. The Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of man in order to give us an opportunity for eternity. So we must never forget that it was the incarnate Son of God who gave up His being in the form of God in order to bring those of faith into His eternal presence (Ph 2:5-11).

Now when we come to a study of the cases of conversion that are mentioned in the document of Acts, we understand that these recorded responses are the result of men and women who recognized who Jesus was. They subsequently responded to everything that Jesus commanded in order to come into His eternal presence. The message of the cross touched their hearts. It was this gospel message that had the power to bring them into an eternal saved relationship with God.

**1. *The Jews on Pentecost*** (At 2:31-47): On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the gospel of the resurrection and kingdom reign of Jesus. He proclaimed that the Jews, by lawless hands, crucified and put Jesus to death (At 2:23). However, God raised Him up (At 2:24). *“This Jesus God has raised up, to which we are all witnesses”* (At 2:32). God has now made Jesus Lord and Christ (At 2:36). *“Now when they heard **this**, they were cut to the heart”* (At 2:37).

In this context, it was the gospel of the cross, ascension and coronation that caused a response of belief in the hearts of many in the audience. Peter instructed that those who believed his message must obey the gospel in baptism (At 2:38). Subsequently, *“those who received his word were baptized”* (At 2:41).

The point is that at the time the audience of Peter was cut to the heart, Peter had not yet said anything about hearing, believing, repenting, confessing or being baptized. This was not the message that moved the audience to be cut to the heart. What moved the people was the message of the death, resurrection and reign of King Jesus. The response of the people was that they heard and believed this message. They subsequently repented and were immersed in response to what Peter said they must do in verse 38.

**2. *The Samaritans*** (At 8:5-13): *“Philip went down to the city of*

*Samaria and preached Christ to them*" (At 8:5). As Paul said, he "determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Co 2:2). This was what Philip determined to know and preach among the Samaritans. As a result, "The people with one accord gave attention to those things that were spoken by Philip" (At 8:6). Those who believed were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (At 8:12,13). Therefore, the gospel was not that the people believed. Believing was in response to what Philip preached concerning Jesus being the Christ (Messiah). They believed his message concerning the death of Jesus for their sins and His resurrection for their hope.

**3. The Ethiopian eunuch** (At 8:26-39): The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53 when he was approached by Philip on a road from Jerusalem to Gaza. The prophecy of Isaiah 53 spoke of the crucifixion of Jesus (At 8:32,33). Beginning with Isaiah 53, Philip "preached Jesus to him" (At 8:35). Philip preached Jesus and His crucifixion. He began from the passage that spoke of the crucifixion and applied the prophecy to Jesus who was crucified and rose again. The result of the teaching was that the eunuch "commanded the chariot to stand still. And both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him" (At 8:38). Therefore, immersion in water for remission of sins was the response to the message that Philip preached. Philip preached the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The eunuch responded by believing and being immersed.

The message is not to believe. The message is Jesus Christ and the good news that He revealed to the world by taking His incarnate body to the cross for our sins. Some would preach faith as the center of reference of their message. But this is not what we see in the preaching of the New Testament. The people were told to believe on Jesus (At 16:31), but their believing was generated by the preaching of Jesus and the cross. Faith, therefore, was the serendipity of Jesus and the cross. Since Jesus and the cross stimulated faith, then Jesus and the cross are our primary message to an unbelieving world (See 1 Co 1:17,23; 15:3,4).

**4. Saul of Tarsus** (At 9:10-19): In Acts 9 the resurrected Jesus personally appeared to Saul (Paul). After three days of blindness in Damascus, Ananias said to Saul, "And now why are you waiting? *Arise*

***and be baptized and wash away your sins***” (At 22:16).

The fact is that at this time in Paul’s conversion, he had come to believe that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God. He knew that Jesus had died, and now, he had visual confirmation through the vision that Jesus had been raised from the dead. What Ananias called on him to do was to respond to the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The statement of Ananias was that he respond to what he knew.

**5. *Cornelius and his household*** (At 10:24-48): When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he rehearsed the gospel message that had been preached throughout all Judea and Galilee (At 10:36,37). He preached that the Jews had crucified Jesus (At 10:39). However, God raised Jesus from the dead (At 10:40). “*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word*” (At 10:44). Peter subsequently “*commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*” (At 10:48). In other words, Cornelius and his household believed the message that Peter preached. It was not that Peter commanded them to hear and believe. This they naturally did when the message of the gospel was preached. However, they needed to be instructed on how to respond to that which they heard and believed. Therefore, Peter informed them to do the same thing that was stated on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38.

**6. *Lydia and her household*** (At 16:13-15): Lydia had an open mind, and thus, she responded to the things that were spoken by Paul. “*She and her household were baptized*” (At 16:15). Paul’s message that caused the response was the message of the gospel of God’s grace through Jesus (See 2 Co 4:15). Her receptive heart moved her to respond in gratitude for what Jesus did for her through the gospel.

**7. *The Philippian jailor*** (At 16:25-34): While in prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas were “*praying and singing hymns to God*” (At 16:25). An earthquake occurred that opened the prison doors. The jailor was evidently “shaken” by the scenario of events, and thus, proceeded to take his own life because he believed that the prisoners had escaped. However, when he was stopped by Paul from doing such, he was moved by the message of what Paul and Silas sang while in prison. He asked Paul and Silas, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (At 16:30).

Their reply was, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (At 16:31). With this command, Paul used a metonymy. All that was necessary for the jailer to do was included in the one word “believe.” This statement was not made to establish “belief only” as that which was necessary for the jailer to do in order to be saved. It was made in the context of what the jailer must do in order to continue his response to the gospel. The jailer was subsequently baptized in response to the gospel (At 16:33).

**8. *The Corinthians*** (At 18:8): When Paul went to Corinth, he preached Jesus Christ and the cross (1 Co 2:2). He first delivered to the Corinthians that which he first received, “*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*” (1 Co 15:3,4).

We could assume that wherever Paul went, he first preached that which he first preached in Corinth. This was the gospel of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. When he preached this gospel, he had the same response as in Corinth. “*Then Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized*” (At 18:8).

That which produces the response of hearing, believing and being baptized is the message of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope. When this gospel message is preached, men and women will respond by doing all that must be done in order to come into a covenant relationship with God.

**9. *The Ephesians*** (At 19:1-5): When Paul arrived in Ephesus he found about twelve disciples who had been baptized into John’s baptism. However, Paul said that they must believe on Jesus as John had said (At 19:4). “*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 19:5). Therefore, the response to their faith was their immersion. We would conclude that anyone who has a sincere heart will do the same when hearing of the death of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope.

The conversion of the Ephesians also emphasizes the fact that sometimes people can be immersed for the wrong reasons. These disciples were baptized unto John’s baptism at a time when John’s baptism was no longer valid. When they heard of the baptism in the name of Jesus



for the remission of sins, they were immediately rebaptized for the right reasons.

Someone might ask, “How many times must one be baptized?” The answer is, “Until you get it right and for the right reasons.” New Testament baptism is not New Testament baptism until it is a correct response to the truth of the gospel. In the cases of conversions that are mentioned in the book of Acts, the right reason for immersion is that it must be in response to the gospel of King Jesus who has authority over all things.

It would be difficult for one to miss the emphasis of the preaching of the crucified and resurrected Jesus in Acts. It was this gospel message that moved men and women to respond by obedience to the good news that the incarnate Son of God brought into the world. That which moved men and women to initially respond to God was not the preaching of church organization, the mission of the church, or its benevolent work. Evangelists did not argue over names and dates, future speculations or present turmoil. They simply moved the hearts of adult men and women by preaching the simple gospel. And when they did this, people were moved to obey all that God required of them to do in order to be saved.

## **Chapter 12**

### **BAPTISM AND VALID CANDIDATES**

Baptism is not a church sacrament that must be performed in order to be joined to a particular religion. It is not a work or ritual one must perform in order to be rewarded with a merit of religious excellence. Somewhere throughout the years in a departure from the New Testament, religious people have lost sight of the spiritual significance of baptism into Christ. With the practice of infant baptism, misguided religious people have completely lost sight of the personal response an individual makes in response to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God.

Baptism has become something that one does, rather than a response one has in gratitude of all that God has worked on our behalf.

The practice of infant baptism reveals this digression from the true purpose of baptism in reference to one's personal response to the gospel. Infant baptism manifests in those religions that practice it a loss of personal conviction on the part of the one who is baptized. In infant baptism, response to the grace of God is counted to be of no importance on the part of the candidate. When babies are baptized, they know and understand nothing concerning the grace of God that appeared on the cross (Ti 2:11). All response to God's teaching concerning salvation is placed on the shoulders of the parents, not the infant being baptized.

The "baptism" of an infant is simply the desires of the parents to have a little water sprinkled on the head of their baby according to their own desires. "Baptism," therefore is simply a church ritual of parents to have their babies dedicated to the Lord. There is certainly nothing wrong with parents dedicating their infants to the Lord. But we must be careful about plagiarizing Bible names and actions that apply specifically to the obedience of adults to the message of the cross. Only adults can be baptized in the name of the Lord, though infants may be dedicated to the Lord. The emphasis of dedicating one's newly born baby to the Lord is on the parents, not the baby. The emphasis of adults being baptized, on the other hand, is on the adult who is baptized.

There are also those just this side of infant baptism who would say to a very small child, "Isn't it about time you get baptized?" It is questionable that an eight or nine year old child can fully comprehend the nature of the incarnational offering of the Son of God for our sins. Nevertheless, in baptizing children some make baptism a legal rite, and thus forget the required response to the gospel that is necessary in order to come into a covenant relationship with God. In such cases, emphasis is often on knowledge apart from response.

Baptism has often been relegated to a type of legal requirement or "church sacrament" that one must perform within the fellowship of a particular religious group. Such a belief is evident in the statement that is often said to children that they must "get baptized."

One must be encouraged to respond to obey the gospel from the heart, not to just “get baptized” in order to fulfill what we might perceive to be a legal work in order to earn one’s salvation. We must understand that when we are baptized we are obeying the good news of the death of the incarnate Son of God for our sins on the cross and His resurrection for our hope. We are responding to His present kingdom reign over all things. We are not performing a meritorious work in order to put God in debt to save us.

There have also been those who emphasize that all one must do is simply understand what one must do in order to be baptized. This could be referred to as “intellectual baptism.” When some young boy or girl wants to be immersed, our response is often to make sure that the probable candidate knows what he or she is doing. Emphasis is simply on knowledge and not commitment or response to the gospel. We often, and correctly, sit down with such prospects and proceed through a host of passages in order that the one who desires to be baptized knows all the right points.

In this interview, however, commitment passages in the New Testament are generally not mentioned. Discipleship, servanthood, prayer life, spiritual commitment, and a disciplined spiritual life are generally not subjects of the discussion. The emphasis is usually on simply understanding Acts 2:38 before one can be baptized. In such cases, we have sought to make one a committed disciple of Jesus **after** he or she is baptized. But such is the reverse of Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 28:19: “... *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ...*”

Jesus wanted us to first disciple people to Him. Once one is committed to be a follower (a disciple) of Jesus, then he or she is ready to obey the gospel by immersion. We must not reverse the order in order to get people to the water.

We must remember that Romans 6:1-6 was written to Christians. Paul instructed the Roman Christians concerning the great spiritual relationship that they had established with God when they were immersed into the death of Jesus. We would assume, therefore, that these brethren did not know all the facts concerning their immersion when they were baptized, neither did they understand all the gospel. This is why

Paul wanted to go to them, that He might have some fruit among them by further teaching in the gospel (See Rm 1:13-16).

Nevertheless, the Roman disciples did know about Jesus and what He had accomplished for their sin problem. Knowledge of what one is doing in baptism is very important. However, personal commitment and a spiritual relationship with the death of Jesus is just as important. It is easy to understand that baptism is for remission of sins. It is not so easy to understand that we are “*baptized into His death*” and that we are crucified with Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). It is even more challenging to understand the gospel of the incarnation of the Son of God. Being baptized into the death of Jesus precludes that one understands first that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God who could die in the flesh. As the Son of God gave up being in the spirit in heaven, and then coming to earth in the flesh of man, is something that must move our hearts (See Ph 2:5-11).

In order for one to be immersed into Christ in obedience to the gospel, therefore, he or she must be a proper candidate. By proper candidate we mean that one must respond to the gospel by faith and repentance. One must understand discipleship to the lordship of King Jesus. Those in the New Testament who were baptized were adults who heard the preaching and teaching of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. They believed on King Jesus. And in submission to His lordship, they repented of their sins. These were the basic prerequisites for immersion into Christ. Knowledge of what God required was involved. However, commitment to be a disciple of King Jesus was a primary motivating factor.

In the religious world today there is widespread controversy and confusion concerning the proper candidates for immersion. A great number of religious groups baptize babies by sprinkling or pouring a little water on their heads and then plagiarizing the word “baptism” from the Bible. These groups often teach that babies have “original sin,” and therefore, they need to be baptized for remission of that sin. It is believed by some that baptism is parallel to the rite of circumcision of the Sinai law. Infants, therefore, should be baptized soon after birth as babies were circumcised soon after birth under the Sinai law.

We must first understand that the simple action of immersion of

an individual in water does not remit sins. There is no saving power in the water. There is no remission in the act of baptism. Immersion is a God-ordained action that is required in order for one to obey the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That which “causes” the remission of sins by God is the blood of Jesus that was poured out on the cross. However, it is at the point of immersion that God says He will apply the blood of Jesus to our sins.

Remission of sins through the blood of Jesus takes place in the heavenly realm. On earth, the spiritual aspect of the new birth takes place in the heart of the individual who is immersed. The heart of the believer, therefore, must be spiritually acceptable through motivation by the gospel in order for God to forgive.

An unbelieving or unrepentant individual will not be forgiven though he or she is immersed. In other words, there is no “spiritual power” in a legal action of immersion to remit sins. One must come to the God-commanded action of immersion with a believing and penitent heart that has been moved by the heart of God. Upon these prerequisites, God says He will “wash away” our sins.

The New Testament, therefore, teaches that there are certain things one must do before one’s baptism into Christ. The point to remember here is that infants can do none of these prerequisites in order to be immersed into Christ. Since they cannot, then they are not proper candidates for immersion.

### **A. Instruction is necessary before baptism.**

Infants cannot be **taught**, but one must be taught the gospel before he or she can be baptized (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; Jn 6:45; At 8:35-38). Knowing what one is doing is important. This was evidently part of the problem in the church at Rome. Some were baptized, but were still “servants of unrighteousness” (Rm 6:13). One cannot live after the flesh when he or she comes into a committed relationship with Jesus. One must continue to live in response to the gospel in one’s life after the event of baptism (See Cl 3:1-17). Obedience to the gospel in baptism is only the beginning to a life of gospel living.

Consider again Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jeremiah recorded God’s promise of a new covenant. God had said, “*And they will no longer teach every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know me*” (Jr 31:34). When one is in a covenant relationship with the Father under the new covenant, he or she **already** knows the Lord. One is taught to know the Lord **before** coming into a covenant relationship with the Lord. This is in contrast to Jewish babies who were physically born into a covenant relationship with the Lord, but had to be taught to know the Lord as they grew up. In the new covenant one is taught to know the Lord **before** he or she responds to the gospel and comes into a covenant relationship with the Lord. Therefore, before one is born again in baptism, he or she must first be instructed to know the Lord.

Knowing the Lord is more than knowledge. It is knowledge that leads to understanding the heart of the God who offered His only begotten Son through incarnation. When we begin to feel the sacrifice of both God the Father and Son in their redemptive work through the cross, then we begin to understand the heart of God. It is this “knowing” that must move us to respond to what God the Father and Son did in order to bring us into eternal dwelling.

## **B. Belief is necessary before baptism.**

Infants cannot **believe**, but one must believe on the Lord Jesus before he or she can be baptized. Jesus said, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk 16:16). From this statement we would correctly assume that belief is inseparably linked to baptism. One must first believe on Jesus as the fulfillment of all prophecy that He was the Messiah and Son of God (Jn 20:30,31). One must believe in what he or she is about to commit his or her life. When Philip preached in Samaria, the Samaritans “*believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. They were baptized, both men and women*” (At 8:12). Men and women **believed**. This belief moved these men and women to be baptized (At 8:12). One could certainly go through the motions of baptism without belief. Such

a baptism would be of no profit toward one's salvation. However, it is difficult to see how one could truly believe in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God without responding to Jesus by immersion into a covenant relationship with God.

When the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized, Philip asked for the obvious prerequisite for him to carry out his desire: *"If you believe with all your heart, you may"* (At 8:37). What Philip was saying was that the eunuch could be immersed if he believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Philip placed belief as a definite prerequisite for one to be baptized.

The case of the eunuch helps us understand why Paul responded in a similar manner to the Philippian jailor in Acts 16:30-33. The jailor asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* (At 16:30). Paul and Silas responded, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"* (At 16:31). Belief, therefore, is the foundation upon which one's response to the gospel is carried out. When one truly believes, he or she will do that which is necessary to carry out belief in obedience to God.

In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."* We could illustrate this statement by saying that he who eats food and digests it, will live. But he who does not eat, will die. There is no sense talking about digestion, if one does not eat. The same is true of baptism. *"He who does not believe will be condemned."* There is no sense talking about baptism if one does not believe. The emphasis of Jesus in Mark 16:16, therefore, is on belief. One must believe. Baptism without belief is useless. It is useless because one has not responded to the gospel by belief in the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God.

On the other hand, belief without baptism is also useless. If one does not respond to God with obedient faith, then certainly his belief is as those rulers who believed on Jesus, but were intimidated by the misguided religious leadership. John wrote of these rulers,

*Nevertheless, even among the chief rulers also many believed on Him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (Jn 12:42).*



These “believers” remained condemned because their belief would not move them to confess Jesus. Jesus said, “*Whoever will deny Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 10:33). Jesus will not confess before the Father those who believe, and yet, are not baptized in response to the gospel of His Son. One’s obedience to the gospel in baptism is a living confession that one truly believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

### **C. Repentance is necessary before baptism.**

Infants cannot repent of sins, but one must repent before he or she can be baptized. Peter said, “*Repent, and be baptized*” (At 2:38). He also stated, “*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*” (At 3:19).

Babies are not sinners. They have no sin of which to repent. If they did, then they could not even say the words to express their repentance. Therefore, they are not proper candidates for baptism because they cannot feel or express their repentance if they had sin of which to repent.

### **D. Obedience to one’s conscience is necessary in baptism.**

In 1 Peter 3:21 Peter wrote, “*The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us—not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God.*” In this statement Peter is saying that one is baptized **in answer to a good conscience**. It is not as in the case of infant baptism where the parents are working on behalf of their own conscience. It is the conscience of the one who is being baptized that must be considered. Parents cannot work on the behalf of the conscience of their infant.

Therefore, before one is baptized, his conscience must be stirred by the gospel. He is immersed in order to satisfy his conscience concerning what he knows the Bible tells him to do in order to be obedient to the gospel. This is obviously not something infants can do. Therefore, they cannot be immersed for the purpose of cleansing their con-

science before God. Infants are born with a pure conscience, not one filled with a sinful nature.

From the preceding points, we must remember some very important concepts. One must be able to be taught before he can be baptized. He must be able to believe that which he is taught. He must be able to respond with repentance to that which is taught. In answer to his good conscience to do what is pleasing to God, he then can be baptized. These prerequisites for immersion are not for infants. In fact, babies cannot be taught the word of God. They cannot believe or repent. Infants are thus not biblical candidates for obedience to the gospel. They are safe with God and have no need of being baptized for remission of sins.

In conjunction with this subject there are usually discussions concerning the time when one should be immersed after hearing about Jesus. Many have taught that one should be immersed “the **same hour** of the night.” This was certainly the response of the jailor in Acts 16:33. Those on Pentecost were baptized the **same day** (At 2:41). Therefore, if one understands the death of Jesus for his sins, and that Jesus was raised for his eternal life, then certainly one must be baptized the “same hour of the night.” However, this was not always the case in the New Testament.

The immediacy of one’s immersion depends on the situation. The Scriptures certainly do not teach the concept of delaying one’s baptism until he or she graduates from a series of lectures on discipleship. Neither do the Scriptures teach that the time one is baptized is dependent on the judgment of the one who does the teaching. The time when one is to be baptized depends solely on the one who seeks to be baptized.

One must be a committed disciple of Jesus before he or she is immersed. This much we can clearly understand from what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19: “*Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ....*” Disciples are baptized. We do not baptize, and then make disciples. When we **reversed** the order of what Jesus said in Matthew 28:19 we create many problems among those who have not committed themselves to live the gospel. We have baptized unrepentant people who

have become a thorn in the flesh to the leadership of the church. Uncommitted people are often baptized, and then have to be continually exhorted to be faithful to the Lord. But if one is a disciple, he or she is already committed to the Lord before going down into the waters of baptism.

Jesus emphasized that the apostles make disciples, and then, baptize the disciples. However, it is each disciple's choice concerning his obedience to the gospel, not the choice of the one who makes the disciples. It is the responsibility of the disciple to choose to serve the One he or she has chosen to follow. However, when one realizes that his sins must be washed away in baptism, he will be baptized as soon as possible.

We must consider that God gave Paul **three days** before he sent Ananias to him in order to baptize him. God gave Paul time to think about what he was getting himself into.

And then, there is the case of the eunuch. He went to Jerusalem to worship (At 8:27). Certainly, he showed up at the temple where he encountered Christians who were **daily in the temple** where they "*did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ*" (At 5:42).

When Philip came into contact with the eunuch on the Jerusalem/Gaza road, he asked if he understood the prophecy of Isaiah 53 (At 8:30-33). The Jews had taught that Isaiah was talking about himself in Isaiah 53. However, Christians taught at the temple that Isaiah had prophesied of the crucified Christ.

The eunuch seems to indicate in his frustrated question of Acts 8:34, that he had contacted Christians in the temple of Jerusalem who had taught him that Isaiah was talking about someone else other than Isaiah. Therefore, when Philip met the eunuch, he had already heard and learned of Jesus (See Jn 6:45). Philip only joined with the eunuch to fulfill all righteousness by baptizing the eunuch. We would conclude, therefore, that the eunuch had some time to consider what he must do with this Jesus about whom he had been taught in Jerusalem.

When one should be baptized after hearing the gospel depends on the individual and the situation. It may be that one hears the gospel in a desert place, as the eunuch. Therefore, he or she can be baptized only

when enough water is found for baptism. This is one reason why John the Baptist baptized in Aenon. There was much water where he was baptizing (Jn 3:23).

The key point to consider is whether one has committed himself or herself to be a disciple of Jesus. To some this would be immediate. Others might need “three days” as God gave Paul. Whatever the case, the important thing to remember is that in obedience to the gospel one is making the most important decision and transition in his or her life. One does not come into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on a notion. Dying with Jesus and being buried with Him is serious business. Infants cannot do this. This is why the practice of infant baptism degrades New Testament teaching concerning the importance and meaning of baptism in the life of an adult. The practice degrades the New Testament teaching on the subject because the New Testament places much emphasis on the responsibility of those who have been taught that they must sacrificially obey the gospel.

## **Chapter 13**

### **BAPTISM AND HOUSEHOLD CONVERSIONS**

Baptism of infants is a widespread practice among several religious groups. This has been a practice that has existed for centuries. It is a practice that has a strong emotional hold on the religious thinking of many parents concerning their newborn babies. It is important, therefore, to study this subject in relation to what the Bible teaches because of the emotional attachment parents have with their newborns.

Our conclusion must not be based on what we as parents may find to be comforting in our hearts, or what our religious heritage and traditions might dictate. If this practice is biblical, then certainly it should be a part of the religious belief and practice of all who seek to obey God. However, if this teaching is simply a traditional practice that has been bound on the consciences of sincere parents, then we must consider it as simply a traditional teaching without any authority of the Bible.

## A. The baptism of men and women:

In order to answer those who promote infant baptism, it is imperative to understand first who was baptized in the New Testament. When we study the New Testament cases of immersion, we discover that those who were baptized were adult **men and women**. The emphasis in conversion was on those who **sincerely recognized their accountability before God**. Those who recognized their accountability were those who could discern between right and wrong when they heard the truth of the gospel preached and God’s call on all people to take ownership of their own sins. Luke recorded in Acts 5:14 that *“believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”* Philip preached in Samaria in order to appeal to adults. Luke wrote of what took place after Philip’s preaching in Samaria: *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized”* (At 8:12).

When Saul persecuted the church, he imprisoned only those who were “of the Way.” This included only **men and women** (At 9:2). No infants were baptized or imprisoned for being “of the Way.” Those baptized in the first century were accountable individuals who had responded to the preaching of the gospel.

Both in Acts 5:14 and Acts 8:12, “men and women” are specifically mentioned as those who were baptized. It is significant to note that the text makes specific mention of men and women. We wonder why adults would have been stated specifically if infants were included in these cases of immersion. By simply reading the narrative, the obvious conclusion would be that no infants were included. The Holy Spirit wanted us to understand that only accountable men and women were baptized.

It was somewhat prophetic of the Holy Spirit to mention in these particular cases that only men and women were baptized. He possibly knew that the time would come when infant baptism would be introduced as a substitute for the immersion of believing adults. He thus made it perfectly clear that only men and women were baptized in the first century.

## **B. The cases of “household baptisms”:**

In the New Testament there were several cases of what is referred to as “household baptisms.” These were baptisms of entire families, including the servants who were considered part of a household. Those who support the practice of infant baptism today believe and teach that there were infants in these household baptisms of the book of Acts. But this is an unjustified deduction. There is no proof that there were babies in the baptisms of these households. A brief survey of what took place in the household baptisms in the New Testament clearly teaches that no infants were involved in the baptisms.

**1. *The household of Lydia*** (At 16:14,15): This “household baptism” is not justification for the baptism of infants. We cannot assume that there were infants in the household of Lydia for the following reasons:

- a. No infants are mentioned.
- b. Those who were baptized in this case were those who “gave heed” or attended to the things that Paul preached. Infants cannot give attention to things that are spoken concerning their salvation.
- c. To say that infants were included in this baptism we would have to assume that Lydia was married. There is no indication in the text that she was married. We would also have to assume that she had infant children. And we would have to assume that she had her children with her. We must remember that Lydia was about four hundred kilometers away from her home that was in the city of Thyatira.

**2. *The household of the Philippian jailor*** (At 16:30-34): We cannot assume that there were infants in this household baptism for the following reasons:

- a. No infants are mentioned.
- b. All who were baptized in this household were able to **hear** and **understand** the “word of the Lord.”

- c. Those of this household were also able to **believe** on the Lord Jesus before their baptism.
- d. Those who were baptized, **rejoiced** greatly after their baptism.

Infants can do none of these things. Therefore, we must rightly conclude that there were no infants in the household of the Philippian jailor when all his house were baptized.

**3. *The household of Cornelius*** (At 10,11): We cannot assume that there were infants in this household baptism. This is true for the following reasons:

- a. No infants are mentioned.
- b. All of Cornelius' house **feared** God.
- c. All who were baptized in Cornelius' house were able to do the following:
  - (1) **Hear** the word (At 10:44).
  - (2) **Speak** with languages (At 10:46).
  - (3) **Magnify** God (At 10:46).

Infants can do none of these things. Therefore, we must conclude that there were no infants baptized when the household of Cornelius was baptized.

**4. *The household of Stephanas*** (1 Co 1:16; 16:15): The following two points will not allow infants to be included in the baptism of the household of Stephanas:

- a. No infants are mentioned.
- b. 1 Corinthians 16:15 states that Stephanas' household "*dedicated themselves to the ministry of the saints.*" If we assume that infants were included in the household baptism of 1 Corinthians 1:16, then we could also assume that Corinth had "ministering infants" as stated in 1 Corinthians 16:15. The church in Corinth had no "ministering infants," and thus, we must conclude that no infants were included in the household baptism of Stephanas in 1 Corinthians 1:16.



In order to make a correct inference from a passage of scripture that does not specifically justify the inference, **that which is inferred must be clearly taught by either declarative or imperative statements in other passages.** For example, Jesus made a declarative statement concerning belief in John 8:24: *“Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* In this declarative statement of Jesus, He said nothing concerning repentance. However, we could correctly infer that repentance is required in conjunction with the requirement of belief in order that one not die in his sins. We can make this assumption simply because repentance and baptism are clearly stated in declarative and imperative statements in other contexts. Peter stated that the Lord is *“not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pt 3:9). This declarative statement, in conjunction with John 8:24, makes repentance a correct inference in Jesus’ requirement that one believe.

This brings us to the practice of infant baptism in reference to the cases of household baptisms in the New Testament. **The point is that before one can correctly infer that there were infants in the preceding cases of household baptisms, in which cases there is no specific mention of infants, then there must be declarative or imperative statements in other contexts that require infants to be baptized.**

The difficulty facing the proponents of infant baptism is the complete silence of the Scriptures on this matter. There are absolutely no statements throughout the entire Bible concerning the practice of infant baptism. To practice such is thus an addition to the word of God. If one binds the practice on the consciences of men, then he is adding to that which God requires of one to be saved (See Rv 22:18,19).

### **C. Infant baptism is not authorized by the Bible.**

It is a serious matter to add to God’s word and bind on the consciences of parents those things that God does not bind. The principle that John stated in Revelation 22:18 is applicable to the subject under

discussion here. John warned, *“If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.”* Infant baptism is certainly an addition to that which God requires of someone to obey in order to be saved. It is an addition simply because there is no scripture that binds such on the consciences of an alien sinner. Since there is no scripture binding such on the alien sinner, then we must conclude that such is not necessary for salvation, but is simply a religious tradition of men.

The fact that infant baptism is not found in the Bible is a major argument against its practice as a binding command. As in Revelation 22:18, the New Testament makes several other warnings against adding to one’s faith those things that God has not added. Paul exhorted that we should learn *“not to think above what is written”* (1 Co 4:6). In his letter to the Galatians, he warned the Christians not to be turned aside to another gospel. He wrote, *“But even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* (Gl 1:8).

The problem among the Galatian disciples was that there were those who were binding teachings that God had not bound. They were making such unbound legal requirements for salvation (See At 15:1,2). But doing this is inventing “another gospel” after the traditions of men. When we bind where God has not bound, we are creating a religion after our own teaching.

The record of those who were baptized two thousand years ago contains absolutely nothing concerning infant baptism. Adding this practice as a binding religious law would be going beyond the authority of the Scriptures, and thus would be a part of religion, not Christianity.

To practice infant baptism is to go beyond the teaching of the New Testament, for the New Testament says nothing about it. The entire Bible says nothing about it. Those who teach infant baptism as a religious practice have no Bible authority for doing such.

#### **D. The testimony of scholarship:**

Religious scholarship confirms that the practice of infant baptism originated after the first century. Concerning this addition, it is interesting to note the early comments of Origen (A.D. 185 - 254) on this subject.

Having occasion given in this place, I will mention a thing that causes frequent inquiries among the brethren. Infants are baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Of what sins? Or where have they sinned? Or how can any reason of the saved in their case hold good? But according to that sense we mention even now: None is free from pollution, though his life be but the length of one ray upon the earth. And it is for that reason because of the sacrament of baptism that pollution of our birth is taken away, that infants are baptized? (*Works*, Vol. 1).

The above is one of the earliest statements that was made in history on the subject of infant baptism. However, what is important to note in church history is that there is no mention of any kind of infant baptism **that dates to the first century**. Many religious leaders who practice infant baptism today are honest in their admission that their practice did not originate in the first century. The Roman Catholic leader Bertrand Conway wrote that **“there is no express mention of the baptizing of infants in the New Testament”** (*The Question Box*, p. 155). In the Roman Catholic book, *Teachings of the Catholic Church*, it is stated, **“The baptism of infants is not positively directed in the Gospel”** (Quoted in *The Question Box*, p. 23). Such an admission should urge those who practice infant baptism to take another look at what is said in Galatians 1:6-9 and Revelation 22:18,19 concerning God’s judgment of those who would add to the word of God.

God is serious about our not binding upon the consciences of men those things that He has not bound. If religious practices are bound upon people, which practices are claimed to have originated from God, then the Scriptures pronounce harsh judgments on those who would bind such man-made religious traditions. Unbiblical religious traditions that are bound on the consciences of people lead one away from the authority of God’s word. When people ignore the authority of the

word of God, they will create a religion after their own desires, and thus, eventually reject the commandments of God in order to keep their religious heritage (Mk 7:1-9).

Once people become faithful to their traditions, and thus their religious heritage, they usually do not return to the authority of the word of God in all matters of faith. They have set their course to maintain their own religion, which religion is an invention of man. It is for this reason that we encourage people to reconsider their practice of infant baptism. If infant baptism cannot be found in the New Testament, then it is an invention of men. And since it is a religious invention of men, then no parents will be held accountable before God for not baptizing their infants.

## Chapter 14

# BAPTISM AND INFANT SALVATION

As previously emphasized, infant baptism is a major practice and belief in the religious world. Changing from this belief to the truth concerning true candidates for baptism is often quite difficult for parents. When one has for generations been in the bondage of a religious group that has baptized babies, it is psychologically challenging to leave this tradition behind. For this reason, we must give some special attention to the nature of the soul of babies and their relationship to God in order to reassure parents that their babies are safe with God.

An important Bible teaching is the innocence of newly born babies. They are **pure** of sin and **safe** from condemnation. However, a truly false teaching has been developed by some religious groups that centers around the theology that babies are born sinners. Because of this belief, it is affirmed that infants must be baptized for the remission of sins. However, if we fully understand some simple truths on this matter, there will be no reason to believe in the necessity that babies should be baptized because they are supposedly sinners in the sight of God.

## A. **Infants are pure of sin.**

In the sight of God, infants are pure of sin, and thus, do not need to be baptized for the remission of sins. Pure of sin means they have no sin. They are not born sinners, neither do they have the ability as infants to sin by voluntarily rejecting the will of God.

Jesus used the innocence of little children to illustrate the nature of servanthood in the kingdom. He said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and **become as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 18:3). We wonder why Jesus would make this statement if children had a sinful nature? Why would He illustrate the pure nature of the kingdom by that which is supposedly not pure? The answer to this question is that He would not, for children are innocent of sin.

Jesus also said of little children, that “*of such is the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 19:14; see 18:2-5; Mk 10:14,15). The illustration affirms that the kingdom originated from the purity of heaven. It is the kingdom “of heaven.” Since it originates from heaven, then it is pure, for all that originates from heaven is pure. It is not of sin. If we understand this point, then we can understand what Jesus was saying about the nature of infants and children until they reach the age at which they can make a choice concerning the will of God. What Jesus was saying is that the soul of infants is as pure as that from which their spirits originated. Since God, in whom there is no darkness (1 Jn 1:5), is the Father of our spirits (Hb 12:9), then we must conclude that there is absolutely no darkness in an infant at the time of birth.

Jesus told Nicodemus, “*Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (Jn 3:3). Being “born again,” and becoming “as little children,” **refer to the same concept**. When one is born of the water (baptism), his sins are washed away (At 2:38; 22:16). One comes out of the grave of water a new creature in order to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rm 6:4-6; 2 Co 5:17). At the point of immersion, therefore, one is washed of every sin and becomes **pure as an infant when the infant is born**.

The kingdom of heaven is without sin. Jesus keeps the submitted

subject of His kingdom continually cleansed of sin by His blood (1 Jn 1:7). When one continues to allow the sovereign will of Jesus to rule in his or her heart by walking in the light of the gospel, the blood of Jesus continues to wash one of all sin.

The very concept that one must be “born anew” assumes that in physical birth one is pure. Why would Jesus use the statement “born anew” in His instructions to Nicodemus, if infants are with sin when they are physically born? What Jesus was saying was that one must be born anew in order to become pure as an infant when newly born.

One is cleansed of sin by immersion. He is born again to be pure as he was when first born as a baby. The kingdom is free of sin because of the continual cleansing work of the blood of Jesus. These basic New Testament teachings are illustrated by the fact that children are pure of sin. And if children are pure of sin, **then they do not need to be baptized for remission of sins.**

It is often argued that in Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:15 and Luke 18:17 Jesus was urging the little children to come to Him in order that they be baptized. But this is an unjustified assumption, if not a senseless interpretation. It is senseless because the word “baptism” is not mentioned in any of these three chapters. It is not even under consideration. In order for one to make the assumption that Jesus was urging children to come to Him for baptism, he must first find such a teaching in declarative or imperative statements in other contexts of the New Testament. The fact is that there are absolutely no other statements concerning infant baptism throughout the entire New Testament.

## **B. Infants are safe from condemnation.**

If infants are sinless, then it follows that they are safe from condemnation. Children who die in infancy will not be condemned to hell because they have not lived in rebellion to God’s laws while on earth. A baby that does not recognize his accountability to the laws of God cannot sin. Infants do not recognize God’s laws, and therefore, cannot be held accountable to those laws. If a child dies, that child is safe from any condemnation. This is a comforting teaching of the New Testa-

ment that every parent who has lost a child must remember.

Sin is man's free-moral rejection of God's law. John wrote, "*Sin is lawlessness*" (1 Jn 3:4). When one voluntarily refuses to live according to God's law, then he or she sins against God. One can do this by doing that which God says not to do, or by not doing that which God says one must do. In either case, it is the individual who is making a free-moral decision to either do good or do evil. Babies cannot sin after this manner because they do not recognize God's law. They simply behave according to their needs to preserve life. They cannot sin after the Bible's definition of sin.

James adds another manner by which we sin: "*Therefore, to him who **knows to do good** and does not do it, to him it is sin*" (Js 4:17). One must be able to recognize a biblically defined principle of good before he can respond. If he recognizes the good, and refuses to respond in a positive manner, then he sins. Babies cannot respond to biblically defined principles of good. Therefore, they do not sin when they do not respond in order to do good.

Sin is defined in relation to an individual's response to law or biblically defined principles of good. Babies can do neither. Therefore, babies are not sinners. They do not need to be baptized for remission of sins.

Ezekiel said that children will not inherit the guilt of the fathers' sin (Ez 18:20). What Ezekiel was saying was that the children are not responsible for the sin of the fathers. **Everyone will give account of his own sin before God.** Paul wrote, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that **everyone** may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10). To the Romans Paul stated, "*For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ... each one of us will give account of **himself** to God*" (Rm 14:10,12). We will not give account for the sin of any other person, including our fathers. Therefore, we do not inherit the sin of Adam or our fathers. On the day of final judgment, every individual will be responsible for his or her own sin before God. Each person must give account of his own deeds before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Co 5:10). The point is that babies are not accountable for sin. They are pure.



## Chapter 15

# BAPTISM AND COVENANT CONDITIONS

In a previous chapter we discussed the biblical teaching of remission of sins in relation to those who are in a covenant relationship with God. Only those in such a covenant relationship with God have remission of sins because of the benefit of the “blood of the covenant” (Lk 22:20; 1 Jn 1:7). In this chapter we must consider the conditions for coming into this covenant relationship with God in view of the practice of infant baptism. Because infant baptism is often paralleled with teachings concerning the Jews’ covenant relationship with the Father, it is important here to review the principal conditions of this covenant and its nature, both when it was in force with Israel, and its relationship with the new covenant under which Christians now live.

We must first understand that all humanity today lives under the sovereign reign of King Jesus (Ep 1:20-23; 1 Tm 6:15). Those who would be saved, therefore, must establish a covenant relationship with King Jesus. Before the establishment of the new covenant of Jesus, the Jews were in a national covenant relationship with the Father. God had established this covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. However, the establishment of a covenant relationship with the Father under the Sinai law was different from the New Testament covenant relationship that one must establish with God today.

### **A. Inclusion into the new covenant is for accountable people.**

In order for one to become a part of the new covenant, he or she must be one who is able to be held accountable for his or her own behavior. In order to be held accountable, one must be able to respond free-morally to the law of God.

**1. *One is baptized into a covenant relationship with Jesus.*** One is immersed into the body (1 Co 12:13). He is born anew by baptism in

order to enter the body of those who have allowed the kingdom reign of Jesus in their hearts (Lk 17:20,21; Jn 3:3-5). These are those who have come into Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27). But one is immersed only after he or she has heard the gospel message, believed on Jesus, and repented of sins. Only accountable people, therefore, can come into a covenant relationship with King Jesus. Only those who have grown to a mature age where they can intellectually and emotionally respond to the gospel can come into a covenant relationship with Jesus.

**2. Jewish babies were physically born into a covenant relationship with God under the Sinai covenant.** Under the Sinai law and covenant, one was born a Jew. He did not choose to be a Jew. A male Jew was circumcised the eighth day after birth and that circumcision was a sign of his covenant relationship that he had with God as a citizen of the nation of Israel (Gn 17:9-14).

Jeremiah 31:31-34 explains the difference between the old and new covenants. In Jeremiah 31:33 God promised, “*Behold, the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.*” Under this new covenant, God said, “*I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.*” This meant that prospective covenanted people would to come to know God and His laws **before** they established a covenant relationship with Him.

Under the Sinai covenant, the one who was born into a covenant relationship with God as a child of Jewish parents, **had to be taught to know God and His laws after he was physically born a Jew and automatically in a covenant relationship with God.** Under the new covenant, however, people are **already taught** of God and His laws **before** they are spiritually born again through immersion into a covenant relationship with God (Jr 31:34; Jn 6:45). This fact is emphasized in Hebrews 8:11 when the Hebrew writer quoted Jeremiah 31 in order to apply this thought to the Christian age and Jesus’ new covenant. **The point here is that only those who can be taught to know God and His laws can be brought into a covenant relationship with God in the new covenant** (See Jn 6:45). Infants cannot be so taught.

The new covenant of the Son is in force today. Therefore, only accountable people can be taught to know God and brought into this

new covenant. One can come into a covenant relationship with God only when he or she reaches the age of accountability at which time one can be taught the gospel. But until that time, infants are **pure of sin and safe from condemnation**. They are not subject to the law of the new covenant of Christ in the sense that they must recognize the law and obey it. They cannot, therefore, come into a covenant relationship with the Father according to the requirements set forth in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Infants are simply safe with God.

## **B. Circumcision and baptism are not parallel conditions.**

Some have taught that under the new covenant, baptism replaced circumcision. Therefore, it is assumed, children must be baptized today as children were circumcised under the Sinai covenant. The Bible, however, does not teach that the “*circumcision of the heart*” of the new covenant is parallel to the act of circumcision in the Sinai covenant. In Romans 2:29 Paul stated, “*But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and **circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit.***” In Colossians 2:11 he also stated, “*In Him you were also circumcised with the **circumcision not made with hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.***”

In these two statements Paul was not making the spiritual circumcision of the Christian’s heart a replacement of the physical circumcision of the Jewish males on the eighth day after birth. **He was talking about cutting off the old man of sin when one comes into a relationship with Jesus.** His commentary on this thought would be Colossians 3. In this chapter he wrote that Christians must “*put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy,*” etc. (Cl 3:8). Living the gospel is a lifetime struggle to circumcise from one’s heart the evil thoughts and behavior of the flesh.

In beginning the life of gospel living, the Bible does not state or teach that baptism took the place of circumcision. Nowhere does the New Testament make a direct comparison between baptism and circumcision. The fact is that here is a difference between the **purpose** and **function** of baptism, and the same in reference to circumcision.

This difference clearly manifests that baptism did not take the place of circumcision.

**1. *The age of the subjects is different.*** Circumcision of the Sinai covenant took place on the eighth day after birth (Gn 17:12; Lv 12:3). But under the new covenant, candidates for baptism must be old enough to understand, believe and obey the gospel in baptism. There is no set date or age for being baptized. There was a set day for circumcision under the Sinai law, but not for baptism under the new covenant.

**2. *Baptism is obedience to the gospel, but circumcision was a token of an existing covenant.*** Circumcision was a token, or sign, of a covenant between God and Abraham (Gn 17:9-14). It later became a sign of the covenant between God and the nation of Israel. Baptism, however, is an obedience to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-5). It is a response to the gospel. Therefore, the purposes of baptism and circumcision are completely different.

**3. *The candidates for baptism and circumcision are different.*** Circumcision was a ceremonial rite under the old Sinai law. It was administered to **males only** (Gn 17:10). But since the establishment of the new covenant, baptism is required of both males and females (At 8:12).

Circumcision was never administered to females under the Sinai law. If baptism is to be administered to the same persons as was circumcision under the Sinai covenant, then females should not be baptized today because females were not circumcised under the Sinai law. This truth clearly reveals the fact that baptism did not take the place of circumcision.

**4. *Candidates for circumcision had no choice, whereas candidates for baptism choose.*** On the eighth day after birth, the small Jewish infant had no choice as to whether he would be circumcised. He was circumcised because God had commanded that all Jewish males be circumcised. However, under the new covenant, individuals have a choice as to whether they want to come into a covenant relationship with God. They can choose to either accept or reject the gospel.

In Colossians 2:11-14 Paul metaphorically used the Jewish cir-

cumcision of the flesh to refer to a circumcision that is not made with hands. His reference was to what the individual does in his or her own life in making a personal choice to turn from the sins of the flesh (See Ep 2:1-3). The repentant believer in this “circumcision” chooses to cut off the old man of sin (See Rm 6:6; Gl 2:20). This takes place **before** one is “*buried with Him in baptism*” (Cl 2:12).

Colossians 2:13 is a parallel passage with Romans 6:6-8. One is dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of the flesh while the old man still lives (See Ep 2:1-3). However, one is “*made alive together with*” Christ when he comes forth from the grave of baptism (Rm 6:8). In Colossians 2, therefore, Paul is using the Jewish practice of circumcision (the cutting off of the foreskin) as a **metaphor** to represent the cutting away of the old way of life after one is immersed into Christ for the remission of sins.

Religious people must be careful about allowing traditional teachings to direct their religious behavior. In religious groups around the world, several religious traditions concerning baptism have been handed down from one generation to another. It is the responsibility of every generation to reexamine the Scriptures in order to reaffirm their stand upon the authority of the word of God. It is the responsibility of this generation to restore New Testament teachings concerning that truth which is most important to do in order to be saved.

We must urge every Bible student to study thoroughly God’s word on this matter. Sometimes those truths that are most important in reference to our salvation are those truths that are neglected the most in our studies. We too often take for granted simple fundamental teachings. However, we need to continue in every generation to restudy those fundamentals upon which our faith is established. If we do not, then our children will forget those essential teachings that identify the church to be different from the man-made religions of the world.

It is important to reaffirm our beliefs lest the religious culture in which we live influences or intimidates us to accept teachings that are foreign to the Bible. One must not forget that the intimidation of the religious culture in which one lives is very strong. Sometimes it is

stronger than our loyalty to the word of God. But the mark of a good disciple of Jesus is that he will hold to the word of God regardless of the religious heritage from which he or she came.

## **Chapter 16**

### **BAPTISM AND COMMON OBJECTIONS**

Tradition is a tremendous mental force. It is a mental force that is so strong that it nailed the Son of God to the cross, for those religious leaders who rejected Jesus had already done what Jesus said to them in Mark 7:9, “*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition.*” The religious leaders of Israel were so bound to their traditional beliefs that they would not accept even the Son of God who came to them in person. Since they had already rejected the commandments of God, it was easy for them to reject the Son of God. Since they had rejected the authority of the commandment of God, and thus established their own religion (See Gl 1:13,14), it was easy for them to add any religious practice they so chose to their religious system.

Traditional thought still hinders people today from accepting the truth of the gospel. Religious people are still binding on the consciences of people the rites and rituals of religion that God has not bound.

The result of traditional thinking concerning man-made concepts concerning baptism has led to many twisted concepts in reference to the subject. Some of these twisted objections have already been considered in this book. Nevertheless, further reference to these objections will help us better understand and clarify the necessity of immersion in relation to one’s salvation. Each of the following points is a common objection that has been made against the teaching that baptism into Christ as essential for remission of sins:

#### **A. “*Baptism is only a symbol of salvation.*”**

Some have affirmed that baptism is an “outward manifestation of an inward grace.” In other words, baptism is a manifestation of salvation that one has already received after he has made a subjective self-proclaimed emotional declaration of his own salvation, or “has received Jesus into his heart.” It is believed that when one simply “accepts the Lord as his or her personal Savior,” or utters a “sinner’s prayer,” then he or she can assume that one is saved by this self-declaration. Baptism, therefore, is only an option that would follow one’s salvation. Baptism to some thus becomes a “symbol” of something that has already taken place in the life of the one who has accepted Jesus as his or her Savior.

In arguing the above position, some have used Colossians 2:11 as a supporting passage: “*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands, in the removal of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.*” As circumcision was a “sign” of the covenant that one had with God when he was born a Jew, then it is assumed that in like manner baptism is a “sign” of salvation that he has before he is baptized.

Though Colossians 2:11 has already been discussed, we must emphasize the context of what Paul meant in the statement of Colossians 2:11. Colossians 2:13 explains the context of Colossians 2:11. Paul stated, “*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all trespasses.*” Paul was metaphorically discussing the “cutting off” of the old man of sin. His context here was the exact same context as Romans 6 where he stated in relation to baptism, “*Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer be bondservants to sin*” (Rm 6:6). Paul’s argument is this: “*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching that was delivered to you.*” (Rm 6:17).

At the point of immersion, the old man of sin was buried in a tomb of water. The old man, according to the metaphorical phraseology of Colossians 2:11, was “cut off” by being buried with Christ. This was done “**by the circumcision of Christ,**” not the individual who is bap-



tized. In other words, when one is baptized, **it is Christ who cuts off the old man of sin.** At the cross, Christ accomplished the spiritual action of “cutting off” that is mentioned in the context of Colossians 2, but the old man of sin is buried at the time of baptism in order to be raised a new man in Christ.

The old man of sin is “circumcised” at the point of baptism. This is where the remission of sins is activated in the life of the repentant believer. Paul metaphorically used the term “circumcision” in Colossians 2:11 in reference to this cutting off of the old man of sin. It is not used to refer to something that has already taken place in the personal life of the individual who is baptized. Therefore, baptism is not a symbol of salvation that has already taken place in the life of an individual. Baptism is a time when the old man of sin is buried. It is a time when Jesus’ crucifixion of the old man with Him on the cross is finally buried in a grave in order to be raised a new creation (Rm 6:6; 2 Co 5:17).

In baptism there is both a physical and spiritual action that takes place. There is the physical action of immersion in water. There is also the spiritual action of burying the old man of sin that was crucified with Christ at the cross. The two actions are combined together at the point of baptism when the old man of sin is buried. The repentant believer voluntarily partakes of the physical action of immersion in water. Jesus took care of the spiritual part at the cross. The old man of sin is finally buried; all sins are washed away. Once one believes, Jesus is ready to take care of the spiritual death problem with a spiritual newness of life (Rm 6:6). For this reason, Ananias said to Saul, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (At 22:16).

## **B. “Baptism is a meritorious work on the part of man.”**

James stated a very important principle concerning the relationship between faith and works with reference to the life of a Christian. The same principle would apply to the sinner in becoming a Christian. “*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Js 2:17). This is an inescapable truth that permeates the Bible. Faith must be

manifested by obedient works. When one recognizes the grace of God that is revealed for the salvation of man, his faith must move him to respond by obedience to the gospel. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “*Through whom [Jesus] we have received grace and apostleship, for **obedience of faith** among all nations for His name*” (Rm 1:5; see also Rm 16:26). This is also the meaning of 2 Corinthians 4:15: “*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people **may cause thanksgiving to abound** to the glory of God.*”

**Neither the Christian nor alien sinner is saved by meritorious works.** That is, one cannot meritoriously work in order to save himself. This principle applies to the keeping of law, as well as the performance of meritorious good works. Paul stated this clearly in Galatians 2:16: “*Knowing that a man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus*” (See Rm 3:20). However, in the same book and in the same context, Paul wrote, “*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, **but faith working through love***” (Gl 5:6). Does Paul contradict himself? Certainly not! His point is simple. Legalistic Jews were teaching that through meritorious law-keeping one could justify himself before God. Paul’s argument against this belief is that no one can keep law perfectly in order to be saved. Neither can one do meritorious works in order to atone for a single sin. Therefore, one must trust in the grace of God for salvation. However, by trusting in the grace of God, we obey in thanksgiving for all that God has done for us through His grace.

Therefore, Paul agrees with James when it comes to responding to the grace of God. Simple, inactive faith will not do. Love of and faith in God must move one into obedience. Individuals must respond to the grace of God that was manifested on the cross. This response is obedience. It is not meritorious obedience. It is obedience in response to the grace of God. This brings us to why one is baptized.

Baptism is an obedient response to one’s faith in the grace of God to save him. One is baptized, not to perform a meritorious work in order to be justified himself before God. One is baptized in response to the gospel of grace that God revealed from heaven through Jesus Christ.

It is after the principle that Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 15:10 concerning the labor of his life: *“But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”*

If the principle of 1 Corinthians 15:10 can be clearly understood, then we have answered the argument that some use to say that baptism is a meritorious work. The same principle is in 2 Corinthians 4:15. When the grace of God is preached and understood, **it causes people to respond in thanksgiving for the good news of the cross and resurrection.** If there is no response, then there is either no understanding of the grace of God or appreciation for what God has worked for us through His Son. Whatever the case in an individual’s life, if one does not obediently respond in thanksgiving to the grace of God, then he is not manifesting an appreciation for the cross. Baptism, therefore, is an obedient response of thanksgiving to the gospel.

Paul stated that as a disciple he “labored more abundantly” in response to the grace of God. Was he stating that his labors were works of merit in an effort to save himself? If one obediently responds in thanksgiving to the grace of God, does this mean that one is working meritoriously in order to earn his salvation? Certainly not!

Notice carefully to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10. God’s grace toward him was **not in vain.** That is, God’s grace was not useless, or unprofitable in his life because he lived by the gospel. The grace was not in vain because of Paul’s labors of thanksgiving. Paul responded to the grace of God in his life; he worked in thanksgiving for what he had, that is, his salvation in Christ. This is why he said, *“yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”*

When Paul realized his salvation because of the grace of God, he responded. His work was by faith in the grace of God that saved him. His work, therefore, was a response, a response of his faith in God’s grace by which he was saved. For this reason, he gave credit to God for his work. And so it is with baptism. Baptism is the sinner’s response to the grace of God that appeared on a cross outside Jerusalem (Ti 2:11).

One is baptized because of faith. Baptism is a response of faith to God’s grace that was manifested on the cross. It is not that one has

already been justified by grace before he is baptized, for where there is grace, there is the forgiveness of sins. Faith must precede the application of God's grace in order to forgive our sins. If one expresses no obedience of faith, then certainly God cannot respond with grace. Therefore, one must respond by faith through baptism in order to receive the forgiveness of sins by the grace of God (At 2:38; 22:16). Forgiveness comes from grace, and thus, one is baptized when he recognizes that God, through grace, will forgive him.

Our faith responds through baptism. God responds to our faith by grace. This is exactly what Paul said in Romans 5:1,2:

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom also we have access by faith into this grace** wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

We have access to the grace of God through our faith. But this must be an obedient faith. James was clear. "Faith without works is dead." Our faith, therefore, must respond; it must be obedient. Obedient faith is the door through which we must enter into the realm of the grace of God. In conversion, obedient faith in baptism is the access door through which all must pass in order to receive the forgiving grace of God. Thus baptism can never be a meritorious work. **It is a work of thanksgiving in response to one's faith in the saving grace of God.**

Those who teach that baptism is not necessary are actually saying that the grace of God is insufficient to move one to respond with thanksgiving to the gospel. In other words, if one does not faithfully respond to the grace of God in obedience by immersion, then God's grace is useless in reference to one's salvation.

### **C. *"Paul said we are not sent to baptize."***

In 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul said, "*For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*" Because people misunderstand the context of this statement, they unfortunately believe that baptism is not necessary for salvation. However, in the very context in which this

statement is made, Paul affirmed that one is “of Christ” only if he has been baptized in the name of Christ (1 Co 1:13). He also testified concerning the first converts of Corinth whom he had personally baptized (1 Co 1:14-16).

What Paul is affirming in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is the principle of the preceding point. He preached the gospel of God’s grace. As Philip preached the same to the eunuch, the response was the same. The eunuch responded by requesting that he be baptized (At 8:36). Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas in Corinth, responded in the same manner. They manifested their response to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by crucifying the old man of sin, burying him in a tomb of water, then resurrecting the new man. The fact that they responded by immersion emphasizes the fact that Paul preached what men and women must do in order to respond to the gospel. What they must do in response to the gospel is obey the gospel by immersion into Christ (Rm 6:3-6; see 2 Th 1:7-9).

The message of Paul’s preaching was Jesus Christ and His crucifixion (1 Co 1:23). We must read the entirety of 1 Corinthians 1:17. *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void.”* The gospel was the first thing that Paul preached in Corinth (1 Co 15:3,4). When the good news of the cross is preached, men and women naturally want to connect with Jesus. They want to connect at the cross, and then join with Jesus in burial and resurrection. Therefore, when we preach the cross, the burial and resurrection naturally follow. The cross is the motivation. Baptism and resurrection are the response. One has not fully responded to the message of the cross unless he manifests his response by joining with Jesus in burial and resurrection (See Rm 6:3-6).

#### **D. *“The thief on the cross was saved without baptism.”***

In Luke 23:43 Jesus said to the thief on the cross, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* From this statement some have affirmed the teaching that baptism is not necessary for sal-

vation simply because the thief on the cross was not baptized, and yet, he was saved by Jesus.

The above argument manifests at least three critical misunderstandings concerning biblical interpretation. First, those who make this argument do not understand the New Testament concerning the baptism to which we today are to submit in order to be saved.

Second, this argument also manifests both a misunderstanding concerning the covenants of God, as well as God's requirements on the part of man for his salvation under the New Testament covenant.

And third, those who make this unfortunate argument against being baptized truly do not understand who Jesus was and is. Now consider the following answers to the objections to baptism because Jesus personally saved the thief who lived when the Sinai law was still valid:

**1. *The thief could have been baptized unto John's baptism.*** John came baptizing **for the remission of sins** (Mk 1:4). As a result of his preaching, many went out to the wilderness where he was preaching. They heard and were baptized (See Mt 3:5,6; 21:32; Lk 3:21; 7:29). Since the thief on the cross showed repentance and knowledge of who Jesus was, it is possible that he had been a student of John. The man feared God for he said to the other thief, "*Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?*" (Lk 23:40). The thief also knew that Jesus was a man who had done nothing wrong (Lk 23:41). Would it be too much to assume that he had contact with both John and Jesus during their ministries? Who is to say that he was not baptized for the remission of sins unto John's baptism? Simply because the text does not say that he was not baptized does not mean that he was not.

**2. *The thief lived under the Sinai covenant.*** The new covenant of Jesus did not come into force until the death of the testator, Jesus, and its official announcement in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. A testament is in force when the testator is dead (Hb 9:16,17). "*For a covenant is ratified upon death, since it has no force while the one who made it lives.*" (Hb 9:17). When Jesus was still alive on the cross, His testament had not yet been brought into effect. Even when the death of the testator occurs, his testament is not brought into force until its offi-

cial announcement.

Under the Sinai covenant, **baptism in the name of Jesus for remission of sins was not a condition for salvation.** This baptism was not announced as a part of the new covenant until the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. **The thief lived under the old covenant,** not the new. He was not subject to the new, but the old. Therefore, he was not subject to immersion for remission of sins in the name of Jesus. Only those who lived after the official announcement of the kingdom reign of King Jesus in Acts 2 were subject to baptism in the name of Jesus (See At 2:38).

**3. The thief could personally be saved by Jesus.** It is certainly not a good illustration to use Jesus' saving of the thief as a model for our salvation today. Those who would use the thief to argue against the necessity of baptism prove too much. If the thief is a model for how one should be saved today, then we would have to have the **personal presence** of Jesus in His incarnate state in order to be saved, for Jesus was there in the presence of the thief.

Jesus on the cross was the conclusion of His earthly ministry. This event took place before His death and resurrection. On this occasion Jesus personally spoke the words of salvation to the thief. Must we have Jesus today personally speaking words of salvation to each sinner in order that they too be saved?

**We must remember that while on earth, Jesus as the Son of God. He thus had the authority to personally forgive sins since He was the incarnation of God on earth.** In the healing of a paralytic, Jesus said to the scribes who questioned His authority, ***“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”*** (Mt 9:6). While Jesus was on earth, and during His personal ministry, He as the Son of God could personally forgive sins. He could because sin that was committed was sin against God who Jesus was. This was Jesus' argument against the religious leaders who accused Him in the context of Matthew 9.

Jesus' forgiving of the thief on the cross was His last effort to prove to us that He was the Son of God on earth with the authority to forgive sin. While on earth Jesus could grant forgiveness of sins be-



cause sin was against God. Today, forgiveness is through His blood. And one comes into contact with Jesus' blood through obedience to the gospel in baptism.

**4. *The thief could not obey the gospel.*** In order for one to be saved today, he or she must obey the gospel which is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (1 Co 15:3,4; see 2 Th 1:7-9). One obeys the gospel by being buried and raised with Christ (Rm 6:4,5). One is baptized into the death of Jesus and resurrected from the tomb of water.

The thief lived before Jesus had died and was resurrected. How could he have been baptized in obedience to the gospel when the gospel event had not yet taken place? He could have been baptized unto John's baptism. However, John's baptism was not in obedience to the gospel. It was a baptism "unto repentance" (Mk 1:4). The baptism of the new covenant is in the name of Jesus into His death, burial and resurrection.

Those who were baptized unto John's baptism after the establishment of the new covenant in Acts 2, had to be rebaptized in the name of Jesus. This was the situation with some disciples in Ephesus who had been baptized with John's baptism (At 19:1-6). When Paul learned that they had been so baptized, he rebaptized these disciples in the name of Jesus (At 19:4,5).

### **E. *"One is saved by faith when there is no water."***

In Matthew 12 the Pharisees unjustly accused Jesus and His disciples of working on the Sabbath by plucking ears of corn from the fields and eating the grain in the fields. They accused, "*Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath*" (Mt 12:2). Jesus' response to their accusation can be applied to answer the argument that salvation is by faith only because there are cases where people believed, but could not be baptized for lack of water.

Consider closely Jesus' response to the Pharisees. "*Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him*" (Mt 12:3). David had entered into the tabernacle and eaten the showbread that legally could be eaten **only by the priests** (Mt 12:4).

The law said that this bread was reserved only for the priests (Ex 29:32). But when David was fleeing from Saul for his life, he and his men broke this law in order to live. A higher law was in place in this case that the Pharisees knew. The higher law was that God's anointed, David, should be preserved as the future king of Israel. For this reason, when David ate of the showbread, he did not break the written law of Exodus 29:32 because there was a higher principle of law that came into force.

Because the higher principle of law of the preservation of the future king of Israel, David's breaking of the law by eating the showbread **did not make him a lawbreaker, nor did his actions change the law.** The occasion was unusual, and thus, the higher law of his preservation was greater at the time than the law that only the priests eat the showbread. **But his breaking of the law did not change the law.**

Now some have asserted that if one is in the middle of the desert and hears the gospel and believes, then he is saved at that point, for there is no water into which the believer can be immersed. Therefore, he is saved by "faith only." And because he is saved without immersion in water, everyone is similarly saved by "faith only."

There are two things to consider in reference to this argument. First, hypothetical situations **do not change the law.** By hypothetical we mean circumstances that are dreamed up in order to establish a foundation upon which one interprets the Scriptures, and thus, establishes a law by the hypothetical circumstance. We would also add that unusual circumstances as David's eating of the showbread **did not change the law.** Though a hypothetical situation may have happened, the law remains unchanged under normal circumstances.

If one is saved by faith until he finds sufficient water into which he can be immersed, then we would assume that God knows the heart of this person as He knew the heart of David. When Jesus was preached to the eunuch, we understand that baptism for remission of sins was also taught. And thus, the traveler would do what he was taught to do as soon as he came upon some water. We would also assume that because God knew his heart between the time he believed and the time when he was baptized, that God's mercy and grace would save him if he somehow died before he reached sufficient water at his soonest op-

portunity. We have never heard of such a circumstance where one believed and died before he was baptized. Nevertheless, we would trust in God's grace in such cases, for God would know that the believing traveler would be baptized as soon as he arrived at some water and was able to say, as the eunuch, "*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized*" (At 8:36). We would assume that he was saved before he went down into the water, **but this exception does not change the law that one is to be baptized to wash away his sins**. If the traveler knowingly passed up the water on his way to his destination, then would we conclude that his refusal to be baptized in the water changed the law of baptism?

Second, we must keep in mind that we are not in the business of establishing law through either hypothetical or real circumstances as in the case of David. David's eating of the showbread that was to be eaten only by the priests did not change the law. If it did, then every Jew could scratch from their Bibles the law of Exodus 29:32. **Neither hypothetical nor real circumstances where the law cannot be obeyed can change the law**. Rahab the harlot lied, but was "*justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way*" (Js 2:25). Because she lied to preserve Israel's conquest of the land of promise did not forever change the law that it is sinful to lie (see Rv 21:8).

Those who live in this dispensation of time will be judged by the word of Christ. Jesus said, "*He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him. The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (Jn 12:48). The word of Jesus will be the standard by which we will be judged. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10).

Preachers and teachers of the word of Christ must communicate to others those things Jesus commanded in His word, for it will be by this word that all will be judged. Baptism in obedience to the gospel is a part of the word of Jesus, for He said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mk

16:16). Simply because Jesus made this statement necessitates that those who proclaim the word of Jesus, must also proclaim this teaching of Jesus. Those who do not, are not proclaiming the complete word of Jesus that will be the standard by which people will be judged. They are not proclaiming an essential for salvation that all men must hear and obey.

## Epilogue

The arguments presented in this book will not convince some concerning the proposition that has been maintained and proved throughout this book. The reason they will not be convinced is because of an erroneous religious world view. This world view is based on the idea that man is saved regardless of any obedience he may do in reference to his faith in God. The historical foundation for this belief came out of a religious movement wherein it was taught that people were individually predestined to either heaven or hell, regardless of the free-moral choice of the individual. Since one could not do anything to change his destiny, then it was concluded that salvation could never be based on any voluntary obedience the individual did to save himself (See At 3:19). Salvation, or condemnation, was already predestined by God. No one could change his or her destiny.

From this erroneous belief evolved the concept that no person who was not predestined to be saved could free-morally respond to the grace of God in order to be saved. Though one recognized the grace of God on the cross, he could not respond in any manner in order to save himself unless God had already individually predestined that person to be saved. In relation to the subject of this book, no one could of his own will respond in baptism for remission of sins in order to gain access to the saving grace of God.

The above world view permeates many religious groups today. Though some groups have changed in their teaching concerning individual predestination, they have yet to accept the fact that one has the privilege of free-morally responding to the grace of God by immersion in the name of Jesus for remission of sins. And without this individual and voluntary response, one cannot be saved.

We would conclude that man is a free-moral individual and that he will be held accountable for his sin against God. And because he will be held accountable, then he must do something about his problem of sin. The New Testament is clear on what one must do. The most important thing one must do is to believe and obey the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The apostles called on people to do such. The New Testament writers called on people to do such. And now we call on everyone to do such today simply because the New Testament so instructs us.

No one can say that baptism for remission of sins is not important. Because so much emphasis is placed on baptism in the New Testament, all those who believe the Bible to be the revelation of God must also emphasize the importance of baptism for remission of sins.

God's grace is made active in the life of repentant believers at the point of baptism. It is this grace that saves. There is no magic in the water or saving power in the action of immersion. However, at the point of immersion God declares that all our sins are washed away. They are washed away by the blood of Jesus that flows from the cross of grace. Therefore, we are sent forth to preach the grace of God, the gospel of Jesus. Those who respond today will respond in the same manner as those in the first century. Both men and women will be immersed for the remission of their sins.

We have completed a very extensive study of the subject of baptism. More could be said on the matter. Unfortunately, we live in a religious world where there is great controversy over this subject that should be so easy to understand. The existence of the controversy is striking because the New Testament says so much about people being baptized. One would think that if there were so much teaching on the subject, then there would be little controversy over the matter. But Satan would not be idle in his attack against that which is so important in reference to one's eternal salvation.

We must never underestimate the hold tradition has on the minds of people. This is especially true in the area of religious tradition. Traditional churches have for centuries established various erroneous views concerning baptism. All sorts of beliefs surround this subject that is so

clearly explained in the New Testament. For people to give up misguided beliefs in view of clear teachings in the Bible seems somewhat ridiculous. But we must always keep in mind that the desire of people to create religious beliefs after their own desires and traditions is often stronger than their desire to study objectively and submit to the word of God. Israel is a historical lesson that religious people seek to go their own way, regardless of the word of God (See Hb 2:1-3; 10:39).

At the end of all arguments concerning the necessity of obeying the gospel by immersion in water for remission of one's sins, the final argument is simply, "***He who believes and is baptized will be saved***" (Mk 16:16). Nothing could be clearer. If one truly wants to do what Jesus has told us to do, then he will simply obey Jesus' statement that he be baptized as Jesus Himself was. "*Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him*" (Mt 3:13). This puzzled John, not that Jesus wanted to be baptized, but to be baptized by him (Mt 3:14). But Jesus responded, "*Permit it at this time, for thus it is appropriate for us to fulfill all righteousness*" (Mt 3:15). If one would seek to follow the example of Jesus, then as an adult he or she must be baptized.

Our salvation is not about the tradition of our fathers. It is not about us. It is totally about Jesus in His efforts to bring us into eternal dwelling with Him. And if one seeks to make Jesus the Lord of his life, then certainly he or she will seek out water in order to obey the death, burial and resurrection of the One who gave Himself on a cross for our reconciliation to God. No one will have to urge the one who truly believes the gospel to be baptized. We simply preach the gospel. When one clearly understands the incarnational offering of the Son of God on the cross, he or she does not have to be asked if he or she wants to be baptized. True believers in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God will simply seek out water.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**