



Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation? A Critical Analysis of the Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration


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Introduction


 In the study of Christianity the central doctrine is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul understood the Gospel, the message of the saving work of Christ, to be so important that he said:

 *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9).*

 In the face of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration we must consider precisely what makes a teaching *"another gospel... than what we have preached to you."* It will be my contention that the Scriptures teach clearly that baptism is not necessary for salvation. Baptismal regenerationists, on the other hand, teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. If the Scriptures deny the necessity of baptism for salvation, then its teaching is *"another gospel"* than that preached by Paul.


 We will examine Scriptures purported to teach the necessity of baptism for salvation, and seek to understand their true meaning. We will also show that the New Testament teaches that salvation is strictly by grace through faith apart from baptism.


 There are several religious groups which teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. Among them are several "Church of Christ" groups, some branches of the "Christian Church-Disciples of Christ," and many small groups in the Christian tradition. Of course, the largest and most well-known of the baptismal regenerationist groups is the Roman Catholic church. Such groups teach that water baptism is absolutely essential to the salvation of the soul. Many of them also teach that this baptism must be by immersion, not by pouring or sprinkling. However, we will not herein address the question of the mode of baptism, because baptism's relation to salvation is more important. [1]


 It is the purpose of this essay to analyze the doctrine that baptism is necessary for salvation. In the following pages we will measure the teaching against Scripture, examining the New Testament texts used in support of it, and those which we believe show it to be incorrect. It is not our purpose to question the Christian faith of members of the groups teaching the doctrine of baptismal regeneration; there may well be many sincere Christians who are confused or misled on this issue.


The Thesis


Matthew 28:19-20

 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20).

 We have here a command of Christ that we should make disciples of all nations, and instrumental in that task is the act of baptizing converts. In other words, baptism is part of making disciples. However, it does not say here that baptism is necessary for salvation. The same command also includes the clause "*teaching them to observe all things*" that Christ has commanded them. If we are to assume that baptism is essential to salvation, then by consistent interpretation of the context, we should say that absolute obedience to all of Christ's commands is also necessary for salvation.


 But this, of course, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Scripture tells us that no one, even the Christian, is without sin (I John 1:7-2:2). If, then, we are to say that believers who do not obey all of Christ's commands may be saved, then we may, unless some other text teaches otherwise, say that believers who are not baptized may also be saved.


 Some argue, however, that this verse proves that one gets "into Christ" by being baptized in water. In support, reference is made to a marginal reading in the *Revised Version* which has "into" as the translation for "*in the name of.*" But this certainly cannot *prove* the point: the *Revised Version* simply shows that this is one possible rendering of the phrase, while in fact the more accurate reading is simply "*in.*" This rendering is chosen by the *Authorized Version (King James)*, the *Phillips Modern English Translation*, the *New English Bible*, the *Jerusalem Bible*, the *New International Version*, and the *Today's English Version*. In addition, this is the primary meaning of the phrase (*eis to onoma*) in the Greek. A.T. Robertson, the greatest English-speaking Greek scholar of our century, makes no allowance for the possibility of translating this passage "into the name." [2] A comparison with Matthew 10:41-42 will show that such a translation of *eis to onoma* ("*in the name*") would make many of its uses meaningless. This does not prove that one gets "into Christ" by being baptized in water.


 Matthew 28:19-20, therefore, does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation, or for coming "into Christ."

Mark 16:16

 He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.


 This verse is often quoted as supporting the teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation. However, a more careful analysis of the verse shows that it teaches nothing of the sort.


 While the first clause says that all who both believe and are baptized will be saved, it does not say that all who neither believe nor are baptized will not be saved. In other words, the clause does not exclude any group, while it does tell of a group of people who will be saved, namely, those who both believe and are baptized. But the second clause negates one group: those who do not believe will not be saved. There is no negation of the group of those who believe but are not baptized. Thus, while the verse as a whole does teach that belief is essential to salvation, it does not teach that baptism is.


 While this does not prove that baptism is *not* necessary for salvation, it does mean that this verse cannot be used to prove that baptism *is* necessary for salvation.

Luke 7:30


 *But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (Luke 7:30).*


 This was in reference to John the Baptist's baptism, not to Christian baptism. Therefore, it cannot be used to prove the necessity of baptism for salvation. Acts 18:24-19:7 shows that John's baptism is invalid now. This fact is even pointed out by "Church of Christ" writer Ernest Clevenger in his *Pocket Ready Reference for Personal Workers*. [3] It is thus the more surprising that two other "Church of Christ" writers, A.C. Williams and J. Harvey Dykes, make reference to this verse as an argument in favor of the necessity of baptism for salvation in their booklet *Ready Answers to Religious Error*. [4]


 Furthermore, John the Baptist *preached* baptism. To reject his baptism, therefore, was to reject him. He was sent from God to testify of Christ (John 1:6-7), and therefore whoever rejected him rejected God. It was, then, not specifically the rejection of baptism which caused them to be against God, but the rejection of John which was entailed in the rejection of his baptism. But I will show later that the Christian is not sent to preach baptism, for the Gospel, which he *is* sent to preach, does not include baptism (I Corinthians 1:17).


 Luke 7:30, therefore, does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation.


John 3:5


 *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).*


 If "*born of water*" means water baptism, then this verse proves that it is necessary to be baptized in water to be saved. About that we can be sure. But I will give several reasons why "*born of water*" cannot mean "baptism in water."

 First, at the time that Christ said this, Christian baptism had not yet been instituted. There was no such thing at that time as baptism "*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" It therefore would have been impossible for Nicodemus to understand "*born of water*" as referring to water baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

 Also, this must be seen in the context of verse 6: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,*" and of verse 7: "*Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*" This shows that being "*born again*" (see also verse 3) is being "*born of the Spirit.*" Being "*born again*" cannot be being "*born of the flesh*" (verse 6), so it must be being "*born of the Spirit.*"


 If "*born of water*" meant water baptism, then verse 5 would contradict verse 6, which requires for salvation only being "*born of the Spirit,*" while verse 5 would require being baptized in water *and* being born of the Spirit. But if being "*born of water*" does not mean water baptism, and instead is a figurative way of saying "*born of the Spirit,*" then verse 5 does not contradict verse 6.


 There is good reason to believe that "*born of water*" could be simply a figurative way of saying, "*born of the Spirit.*" The word "*water*" in connection with salvation, the covenant, regeneration, rebirth, is often used in Scripture as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself used water this way when He said:


 *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water (John 7:37-38).*

 In the next verse, John added:


 *But this He spoke concerning the Holy Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive.... (verse 39a)*


 With this interpretation in mind, the reader should note the following verses, and see if they make more sense understanding "water" in each case as a symbol of the Spirit, not as the physical element: Isaiah 12:3, 35:6, 55:1; Ezekiel 36:25; Jeremiah 2:13; Zechariah 14:8, cf. Ezekiel 47:1-5; John 4:10; Revelation 21:6, 22:17. These verses make more sense if we see "water" in them as symbolic of the Holy Spirit. We therefore have good precedent for understanding "water" in connection with salvation as symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and this means that it would be reasonable to do so at John 3:5 as well. [5]


 If this is the case, then John 3:5 would be understood as follows: when Jesus said, "You must be born of water and the Spirit," He used water as a figurative way of saying "born of the Spirit," and then made Himself perfectly clear by reiterating the thought in plain language. Such a form of speaking was common, to the Jews and to Jesus' own teaching. It would readily be understood by Nicodemus, who as a Pharisee would be quite familiar with the Old Testament symbolic usage of "water." Water baptism, on the other hand, in the Christian formula, could not have been understood by Nicodemus, because it did not exist at the time.


 John 3:5 does not even refer to water baptism, or to any form of baptism. It therefore does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


John 19:34

 *But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out (John 19:34).*


 Quite curiously, W.C. Johnson refers to this verse as proof that it is baptism which identifies us with Christ's death where He shed His blood, which saves us. [6] But the objective reader can see no connection between this and baptism. Does Mr. Johnson think that whenever water is mentioned, it must refer to baptism? This would be ridiculous (we have seen that it does not in John 3:5).

 Quite simply, this verse shows us part of the physical cause of Christ's death on the cross. Dr. W. Stroud explains in his work *The Physical Cause of the Death of Christ* that the emission of water from Christ's chest cavity when He was pierced showed that the sac surrounding the heart, which contains a substance most commonly described on sight as water, burst, so that the water was mixed with the blood which flowed from His ruptured heart. (This means, significantly, that Christ died of a "broken heart.").


 Not every historical narrative in the Bible has a symbolic significance. Hence it is not necessary that there be one in John 19:34.


 The text itself appears as simple historical narrative, which does not bear symbolic meaning. But if symbolic meaning is sought in it, it would seem most reasonable to take "water" here as


referring to the Holy Spirit, as was noted in our discussion of John 3:5. Water is more frequently used symbolically in Scripture of the Spirit and therefore it would seem that this would be the most likely candidate, if we were determined to find some symbolic meaning in it. But the best interpretational procedure here is to leave it as an historical statement.


 John 19:34, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


Acts 2:38


 *Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).*


 This is one of the favorite verses of those who believe baptism is necessary for salvation. They point out simply that it says that we must be "*baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,*" and since remission of sins is necessary for salvation, baptism is therefore necessary for salvation.

 A careful study of the Greek grammar at this point shows that it is repentance, not baptism, which is "*for the remission of sins.*" The Greek text reads (translated):


 You (plural) repent and be baptized each one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for (the) remission of the sins of you.


 This makes it clear that "remission of your [plural] sins" is the result of "you [plural] repent [ing]," not of "each one [singular] being baptized." The command to repent is given in the plural number and second person; the command to be baptized is given in the singular number and third person; the sins remitted belong to "you" in the plural number and second person. It is therefore improper to refer "*remission of sins*" to "*baptism*" as its cause, for this would mean that each one was baptized for the remission of the sins of all those present.

 To take baptism here as causing the remission of sins would be to make the text say, "Let him be baptized for the remission of all your sins," and "Let him (another) be baptized for the remission of all your sins," and "Let him (yet another) be baptized for the remission of all your sins," and so on to each person in the group. Thus, each one would be baptized for the remission of the sins of all the people in the group.

 But the grammar instead is quite clear. Remission is the result of repentance, not of baptism. You repent and your sins will be remitted. You all repent and the sins of all you will be remitted. Acts 2:38, therefore, does not teach the necessity of baptism for salvation.

Acts 8:35-38

 *Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture [Isaiah 53:7-8], preached Jesus to [the eunuch]. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"*

 *Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."*

 *And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*



So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him (Acts 8:35-38).



There is nothing on the surface of this account which teaches the necessity of baptism for salvation, but teachers of baptismal regeneration refer to this as a good example of the manner of salvation. The eunuch had heard the Word, he had been taught, he had repented, he had believed, and finally he was baptized to complete the process. They contend that baptism must be involved in "preaching Jesus," because otherwise the eunuch would not have known about it. If "preaching Jesus" included preaching baptism, they reason, baptism must be part of the Gospel, and since the Gospel is the way of salvation, baptism must be necessary to salvation.



But this neglects the context. Verse 27 tells us that this eunuch had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was therefore familiar with the Jewish religion, if not actually a convert to it. If he were a convert, or if he were considering becoming one, he must have known of the Jewish practice of baptizing all converts to Judaism (which had been done for several centuries). The Jews used baptism as an initiation rite for Gentiles who were converted to Judaism, and in other religions as well. [7] Hence the eunuch would have been familiar with this use of baptism even if Philip never mentioned baptism.



What is more, the eunuch was reading from the book of Isaiah, and happened at the moment when Philip joined him to be reading Isaiah 53:7-8. But the tense of the verb "read" in verse 28 is imperfect, meaning that he was continuing to read; that is, he had been reading before Philip got there and was still reading when Philip walked up to him. This makes it very probable that he had also just read Isaiah 52:15, which begins, *"So shall He sprinkle many nations."* The eunuch, familiar with Judaism as he must have been since he had gone to Jerusalem to worship, would almost certainly have known that the Jews referred to this passage in connection with their rite of baptizing converts as initiation.



A further reason to believe that Philip's preaching of Jesus did not include telling the eunuch of baptism is that Paul himself separated the preaching of the Gospel from baptism (I Corinthians 1:17). If Paul had left baptism *out* of the Gospel and Philip had it *in* the Gospel, there would be a contradiction in Scripture. But the simple answer is that Philip did not include the teaching of baptism in his preaching of Jesus.



It is perfectly allowable that Philip could have mentioned baptism, however, without making it a part of the preaching of Christ. The passage only mentions that he preached Christ to him, but this does not mean that after preaching Christ to him, he could not also have told him about baptism, and indeed about many other things. He could, therefore, have told the eunuch about baptism without saying that it was actually part of the saving Gospel.



With all of this in mind, it should be perfectly clear that Acts 8:35-38 does not prove that baptism is a part of the preaching of Christ, that is, a part of the Gospel. It certainly gives no clear indication that Philip taught that baptism was necessary for salvation, or that the eunuch believed it was; indeed not only does it give no clear indication, it gives no indication at all.



Acts 8:35-38, therefore, does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation.

Acts 10:48a





And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48a).





This text is often called upon by baptismal regenerationists to show that baptism is necessary


for salvation. But certainly there is nothing inherent in it which proves this. We all agree that we are commanded to be baptized, and that neglect or rejection of baptism is sin. But some hold this sin to be unforgivable, since one cannot be saved unless one is baptized. I will contend, on the other hand, that this is not the "unforgivable sin," and that the one who commits it, while yet having faith in Christ, is forgiven of this sin and saved anyway.


 First, the mere fact that we are commanded to be baptized, and that is all this verse says, cannot show that baptism is necessary for salvation. We are also commanded not to sin. Does that mean that if we sin, we cannot be saved? But this would be nonsense since in Christ we have forgiveness of our sins. Therefore it is possible to disobey commands of the Lord and yet be saved.


 Now what makes this command from the Lord any different from the general command not to sin, or the commands specifically not to lie, covet, etc., so that disobedience to this command cannot be forgiven while those can? There is nothing in the text which makes that difference, and there is nothing anywhere else where baptism is spoken of that makes that difference. The command which we cannot disobey and yet be forgiven is the command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16b; John 8:24; Acts 16:31). But the whole point of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is that it is obedience to this very command which brings forgiveness for disobedience to any other command (Colossians 1:14; I John 1:7-2:2). True faith in the true Christ brings immediate justification (Romans 3:1-5, 23-28), and justification is an absolute guarantee of salvation (Romans 8:29-30).

 Acts 10:48a, then, does prove that we are commanded to be baptized. It does not prove, however, that baptism is necessary for salvation.

 There is another reason for rejecting this verse as a "proof" of the necessity of baptism for salvation. Those who claim that it is such a proof must ignore or seriously misconstrue the context. Peter was speaking to Cornelius and his friends, and then he turned to the other Christians around and said:


 *Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? (verse 47)*


 Peter said that this group of people had received the Holy Spirit "*just as we have.*" He acknowledged that these people were already saved. Just as truly as Peter and the Christians with him had received the Holy Spirit, so Cornelius and his friends had received the Holy Spirit. Having received the Holy Spirit was proof that they were already saved, as Romans 8:9-16 shows.

 Those who have received the Holy Spirit are the children of God. They are "*born of the Spirit.*" They are "*born again.*" They are guaranteed their inheritance (Romans 8:1-16; II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). They are, in fact, saved. Cornelius and his friends were saved *before* Peter commanded them to be baptized.


 Acts 10:48, therefore, does not prove that baptism is necessary for salvation.


Acts 22:16


 *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16).*


 Baptismal regenerationists often refer to this verse as proof that baptism is necessary for "washing away" sin, that is, for regeneration, for remission of sin. There are several reasons why this


cannot be the case.


 First, a careful study of the Greek text shows that *"wash away"* is coordinated with *"calling."* That is, it is by *"calling on the name of the Lord"* that Paul was to *"wash away"* his sins, not by being baptized.


 Even the English does not say, "be baptized washing away your sins," or "wash away your sins being baptized," but rather *"be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* This shows that washing away the sins and being baptized were separate acts, and that the washing away of the sins was done by calling on the name of the Lord.


 Second, being baptized was not a part of the Gospel which Paul preached. We know this for two reasons. First, Paul carefully distinguished baptizing from preaching the Gospel in I Corinthians, chapter one. There he wrote:


 *I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel... (verses 14-17a)*


 Baptism, then, cannot be part of the Gospel. The Gospel is the *"power of God to salvation"* (Romans 1:16). It tells us what is necessary to know in order to be saved. Paul left baptism out of the Gospel. Therefore Paul did not consider baptism necessary to salvation.

 Secondly, Acts 22:15 says that Paul was chosen to be Christ's *"witness to all men of what [he had] seen and heard."* Paul, however, did not preach baptism as part of the Gospel.

 Hence we must see Acts 22:16 as telling us simply of an historical fact. Ananias told Paul he should be baptized, and Paul was therefore baptized. But the grammar does not support the idea that his baptism was the washing away of his sin. It shows instead that his calling on the name of the Lord brought forgiveness (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10). Baptism was not incorporated into what Paul considered to be the Gospel. Therefore Acts 22:16 does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation.

 A.T. Robertson admitted the grammatical possibility that this verse could be interpreted as teaching baptismal regeneration, or baptismal remission. [8] But grammatical possibility is far from actuality. There is also the grammatical possibility, and a stronger one in fact, that the washing away of sin is accomplished by calling on the name of the Lord. The grammar alone, therefore, cannot settle it, and discussions such as those above are necessary to clarify the matter. Robertson wrote:

 It is possible... to take these words as teaching baptismal remission or salvation by means of baptism, but to do so in my opinion is a complete subversion of Paul's vivid and picturesque language. As in Romans 6:4-6 where baptism is the picture of death, burial, and resurrection, so here baptism pictures the change that had already taken place when Paul surrendered to Jesus on the way (verse 10). Baptism here pictures the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ. [9]

 It is possible, by isolating this verse from its context and from other New Testament teaching on the subject, to take this as teaching baptismal regeneration. But again, this is only one way to understand it. It has already been shown that this would not fit the context, it does not fit the most clear understanding of the grammar, and most importantly, it is contrary to Paul's entire teaching of what the Gospel is (Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10; I Corinthians 1:17; Galatians 1:11-12). Possibility

must not be confused with either probability or actuality.



Acts 22:16 does not teach the necessity of baptism for salvation.

Romans 6:3-4



Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).



Some insist that this passage teaches that water baptism is the means of getting into Christ. [10] But does it really teach this? There are several reasons why it does not.



First, the Greek word here translated "*into*" would be translated better "*in*" or "*unto*." Thus Robertson wrote regarding Romans 6:3:



Better, "were baptized unto Christ or in Christ." The translation "into" makes Paul say that the union with Christ was brought to pass by means of baptism, which is not his idea, for Paul was not a sacramentarian.... Baptism is the public proclamation of one's inward spiritual relation to Christ attained before the baptism. See Galatians 3:27 where it is like putting on an outward garment or uniform. "Into his death"... So here "unto his death," "in relation to his death," which relation Paul proceeds to explain by the symbolism of the ordinance. [11]



Therefore we see that the Greek grammar itself does not teach that the baptism here spoken of is actually the means of getting "into Christ."



Second, Paul is speaking in figures and symbols throughout the first half of this chapter. Would the proponents of baptismal regeneration take verse 6 ("*our old man was crucified with Him*") literally, or will they recognize it as symbolic? It is symbolic, and it paints a vivid picture of dying to self and being alive to Christ. But this gives us precedent to interpret "*baptism*" in this passage as symbolic, too.



Another key to the fact that this passage is to be interpreted symbolically is verse 11, which reads:



Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.




All along, it is this "reckoning" that is emphasized. The "*also*" tells us that we reckon ourselves not only dead to sin, but also reckon other things of ourselves. These are expressed in the two symbols of being baptized in Christ and being crucified with Him (verses 3, 4, 6).





Thus Paul is simply using baptism as a symbol to paint a vivid picture of what happens when one is identified with Christ: that is, when one has "*put on Christ*," and has been "*born again*." Baptism gives an excellent picture of what it is to become a Christian, for it pictures the burial and resurrection. But the baptism itself is not that burial or resurrection. As Robertson put it, "[A] symbol is not the reality, but the picture of the reality." [12] Baptism, therefore, symbolized identification


with Christ.


 Third, that baptism symbolizes identification can be shown by two studies. In I Corinthians 10:2-4, Paul wrote of the Israelites:


 *All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*

 This clearly shows that *"baptism into Moses* was a symbolic way of speaking of their identification with him: they ate the same meat, and drank the same drink: they were identified with him.

 Furthermore, a careful reading of Romans 5:12-6:11 shows clearly that identification with Christ, on the one side, or with Adam, on the other, was Paul's theme. It is by our identification with Adam that death passed upon all men (5:12); it is through his offense that the many are dead (5:15); and by the judgment of him that all stand condemned (5:16); and because of his offense death reigns over all men (5:17) until they are saved (7:25, 8:1); by his offense judgment came on all (5:18); by his disobedience many were made sinners (5:19). But on the other hand, it is by our identification with Christ that we have life: Adam pre-figured Christ in this sense, that identification with him brings on us the things which apply to him, and identification with Christ brings on us the things which apply to Him (5:14). Yet the benefits of identification with Christ far outweigh the tragedies of identification with Adam (5:15); by identification with Him God's grace abounds to those who are identified with Him (5:15); by identification with Him the gift of justification comes to us (5:16); identification with Christ brings abundant righteousness in life (5:17); identification with Him brings justification and righteousness unto life (5:18); identification with Him applies His obedience to us (5:19).


 Paul uses baptism often as a symbol of identification. He does it in 1 Corinthians 10:2. He follows the tremendous passage on identification with Christ on the one hand and with Adam on the other with a more in-depth passage on identification with Christ (Romans 6:1-11). As Christ died for our sins, and *"became sin for us"* (II Corinthians 5:21), so He died to sin because He had taken on our sins (Romans 6:10). Thus when we are identified with Him, we too are *"dead to sin"* (Romans 6:2); we are identified with His death (verse 3), with His burial and resurrection (verse 4), with His newness of life because of this resurrection (verses 4-5), in His crucifixion (verse 6), in living with Him (verse 8), and in dominion over death forevermore (verse 9). Paul concluded this line of thought by writing:


 *For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (verses 10-11).*


 The entire passage of Romans 5:12-6:11 is concerned with our identification first and naturally with Adam, and second and by spiritual rebirth with Christ (John 3:3-6). It is correct, therefore, especially in the light of Paul's usage of the term in I Corinthians 10:2, to understand *"baptism"* in Romans 6 as symbolic of identification. Therefore it is not water baptism which actually puts us *"Into Christ"* or is necessary for our salvation, but identification with Christ: dying with Him to sin, rising with Him to life, living with Him to dominion over death and sin.


 Romans 6:3-4, therefore, does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation.


I Corinthians 12:13


 *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13).*


 Williams and Dykes call on this verse as a proof that baptism is the means by which we get into the Body, or Church, of Christ. [13] There are several reasons to reject this teaching. They teach that this refers to water baptism. But there is nothing in the context to make us think this. The Bible makes reference to baptism in water (Acts 10:48), in fire (Matthew 3:11), in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5), and in Christ (Romans 6:3-4). It is therefore not necessary that we understand I Corinthians 12:13 as referring to water baptism.

 Certainly it is by being baptized by the Holy Spirit that we get "into the body of Christ," but there is nothing to identify this baptism by the Holy Spirit with water baptism. Indeed, the language of Paul both in this verse and elsewhere in this epistle to the Corinthians makes it highly improbable that he meant that this was baptism in water.

 First, Paul goes on after saying that we are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ to say that we also all drink of one Spirit. If we are going to insist on a literal interpretation of "*baptism*" in the first half of the verse, we have a right to insist on consistency and interpret the "drinking" of the second half literally. But this would be nonsense. If we take "drinking" in the second half figuratively, we have a right to take "baptism" in the first half figuratively.


 Second, when considering Paul's words in I Corinthians 1:12-17, it is highly unlikely that Paul would identify baptism by the Spirit into the Body of Christ with baptism by any man. Being baptized by Paul caused some Corinthians to say they were "*of Paul*"; being baptized by Apollos caused some to say they were "*of Apollos*"; or by Cephas (Peter) caused some to say they were "*of Cephas*"; and some retorted arrogantly, "Well, I am simply of Christ." Since this was the case with the Corinthians, it is inconceivable that in writing to them Paul would intend for them to understand baptism by the Spirit as water baptism by a man or men.

 Thirdly, the context of I Corinthians 12:13 is figurative language. Even the word "*body*" is used figuratively to describe the unity of the believers in Christ. Verses 7-11 all speak of a spiritual, not a physical, working by the Holy Spirit. Verses 12-31 all speak figuratively of their various topics. Therefore we have good reason to believe that "*baptism*" in verse 13 is used figuratively of a spiritual, not physical, act of the Holy Spirit.

 The baptism spoken of in I Corinthians 12:13 is figurative, referring to identification. It is done spiritually by the Holy Spirit, not through any physical means, and involves regeneration, the act of making the believer a "*new creation*" (II Corinthians 5:17). It does not refer to water baptism.


 I Corinthians 12:13, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


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


 Williams and Dyke [14] argue that this verse proves the necessity of water baptism for salvation, because it is by such that one gets "*into Christ*." But there are several reasons why this is not the case.


 First, we have already seen that Paul often used "*baptism*" as a symbol for identification. This


usage here would fit the meaning of the text. If it is symbolic of "identification," the meaning would be as follows: "For as many of you as have been identified in Christ have put on Christ." We have good reason from Paul's other writing, as shown previously, to take this figuratively, and it fits the context that way. Therefore the figurative is the most likely meaning.


 Second, the verb in Greek translated "*put on*" has the meaning of putting on a badge or uniform of service like that of a soldier. According to A.T. Robertson:


 This verb is common in the sense of putting on garments (literally and metaphorically as here). See further in Paul (Romans 13:14; Colossians 3:9f; Ephesians 4:22-24, 6:11, 14). In I Thessalonians 5:8 Paul speaks of "putting on the breastplate of righteousness." He does not here mean that one enters into Christ and so is saved by means of baptism after the teaching of the mystery religions, but just the opposite. We are justified by faith in Christ, not by circumcision or by baptism. But baptism was the public profession and pledge, the soldier's *sacramentum*, oath of fealty to Christ, taking one's stand with Christ, the symbolic picture of the change wrought by faith already (Romans 6:4-6). [15]


 In other words, even if "baptism" is taken as referring to water baptism, the language which Paul uses shows it to be an outward sign of something that has already happened inwardly. The baptizing itself then would be an entirely outward event, with no spiritual *effect*, but only a spiritual *significance*. Hebrews 9:13ff reminds us that no outward ceremony has a real effect on the heart.

 Third, the word "*into*" in the *King James Version* would, again by Robertson's principle quoted earlier, be better translated "in" or "unto," meaning "in reference to" Christ, thus showing that the baptism itself is not the means of getting to be "*in Christ*."


 Fourth, Galatia stood in the middle of an area infested with the mystery religions, and these bodies made much of outward acts. Paul was refuting the teachings of these religions, and so there is the initial probability that he did not want "*baptism*" in Galatians 3:27 to be taken as the literal, outward act. Baptism in water was a common initiatory rite in the mystery religions, and Paul knew that from his own travels in the area. It would be extremely unlikely that he would speak of it in the same way they did.

 Fifth, it is by the receiving of the Holy Spirit that we know we are saved. In fact, those who have received Him are saved (Romans 8:1-16). But Paul in Galatians 3:2-3 points out specifically that it is by faith that the Galatians received the Holy Spirit. To say then that Galatians 3:27 teaches baptism as the means of regeneration would make it contradict verses 2 and 3.


 Sixth, in verse 6 Paul quotes the fact that Abraham was justified when he believed God: that is, when he had faith. But Genesis 15:6 shows that this justification came before any physical act, specifically that of circumcision. Now the fact that Abraham was justified by faith without works is proof that he was saved (Romans 8:29-30; cf. Romans 3:1-5, 28). Circumcision is the Old Testament counterpart to baptism in the New Testament (see discussion of Colossians 2:12 later). Therefore we can be saved before and even completely without being baptized in water. (The use of Abraham as an example of the manner of our justification is supported in Galatians 3:28-29, and by Paul's whole argument in Romans 3-4).


 Baptism in Galatians 3:27 does not refer to physical baptism in water, but is figurative of our identification with Christ which is achieved by faith (John 1:12-13), as was the case in I Corinthians 12:13 and Romans 6:3-4. It cannot be used as proof that baptism is necessary for salvation. But even if it did refer to water baptism, it would not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation, for it specifically speaks of it as an outward sign. We know that outward signs do not affect the heart's


relation to God, and we know that there are those who were saved before they were baptized in water (Cornelius and his friends, Acts 10) or were circumcised (Abraham, Genesis 15).


 Galatians 3:27, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


Ephesians 5:25-26

 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing Of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-26).*

 There is no mention of baptism here, but simply "*the washing of water by the word.*" It was shown in the discussion of John 3:5 that "*water*" does not always refer to baptism, even when it is used in the context of washing or regeneration. It more often refers to the Holy Spirit.


 If this were physical baptism, then 1) this would mean that Christ physically baptizes the Church as a whole, not just individual members of it. That of course is absurd. 2) This would mean that, following Christ's example with the Church, the husband should baptize his wife in water (and somehow, he should do this by "*the word*"!).


 The text says plainly that this "*washing of water*" is to be done "*by the word.*" John 8:31-32 says:

 *If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

The Word is the key to this. The "*washing*" is to be accomplished by leading the wife (as Christ led the Church) into the Word. Psalm 119:9 shows clearly that cleansing is accomplished by the Word of God in a person's heart:


 *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*


 This, coupled with the fact that "*water*" here certainly need not refer to baptism in water, is sufficient reason to reject the idea that this verse teaches the doctrine of baptism for cleansing from sin.

 The context shows that this "*washing of water by the word*" is an inner cleansing (verse 27), a making holy of the Church on the one hand by Christ, and the wife on the other hand by the husband. But Hebrews 9:13ff shows that outward ceremonies do not actually cleanse the heart from sin.


 Ephesians 5:25-27, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


Colossians 2:12


 *... [B]uried 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(Colossians 2:12).*


 The previous discussions of Romans 6:3-4, I Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:27 should show clearly that this does not prove the necessity of baptism for salvation. But there is need for discussion anyway.


 First, the verse is frequently quoted out of context. The entire context runs from verse 10 through verse 17:


 ... *You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 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. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*


 *Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

 This context shows that baptism is presented as the New Testament counterpart of circumcision in the Old Testament. They are presented in a careful parallel to each other. The one who is "*in Christ*" is circumcised with a circumcision made "*without hands.*" The parallel usage of circumcision and baptism demands that we understand the "*baptism*" to be made "*without hands*" also. Therefore, this cannot be a reference to literal water baptism, but rather a usage of the figure of "*baptism*" as a picture of dying and rising with Christ, as in Romans 6:3-4.


 Second, since baptism is shown to be the New Testament counterpart to circumcision in the Old Testament, we know that those relations of circumcision to salvation in the Old Testament apply to the relation of baptism to salvation in the New Testament. Circumcision was not necessary for salvation in the Old Testament, for Abraham was saved before he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6). Furthermore, Romans 2:28-29 shows clearly that it is not physical circumcision (that "*made with hands*") but spiritual circumcision which makes one truly a Jew and one of Abraham's children.


 Since baptism is the New Testament counterpart to circumcision in the Old Testament, we may therefore understand Romans 2:28-29 to have the same meaning in relation to baptism that it has in relation to circumcision:

 *For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men but from God.*


 This can also be understood in relation to baptism. To paraphrase the above passage, baptism is therefore not that which is outward in the flesh, but is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and not in the letter. This is precisely what was shown in my discussion of Romans 6:3-4, I Corinthians 12:13, and Galatians 3:27. The use of "*baptism*" by Paul as a symbol for identification thus makes perfect sense, for circumcision in the Old Testament was a means of identification with the nation of Israel. But whereas physical circumcision identified one with the physical, outward Church, spiritual baptism is


that which identifies one with the spiritual Body of Christ.


 The use of "*baptism*" in Colossians 2:12 is figurative, as was the use of it by Paul in Romans 6:3-4, I Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27, etc., and refers to a spiritual baptism "*made without hands,*" an identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. It is accomplished by a direct spiritual act of the Holy Spirit, not by a physical act done by man.


 Colossians 2:12, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.


Titus 3:5

 ... *[N]ot by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...*
(Titus 3:5)

 This verse is sometimes referred to as proof that baptism is the means of regeneration. However, it does not mention baptism, and our discussion of Hebrews 10:22 will show that the regeneration, the cleansing of the evil conscience, is accomplished by washing, or sprinkling in the blood of Christ. Revelation 1:5 makes it perfectly clear that the washing from sin is done in the blood of Christ, not in the waters of baptism.


 Furthermore, there is good grammatical cause to believe that "*washing of regeneration*" means "*washing which is regeneration.*" This is argued for by Charles Hodge, who notes that this would be the meaning as a "*genitive of apposition,*" identifying "*washing*" with "*regeneration.*" Thus Hodge writes, "*We are saved by that washing which is regeneration, namely, the renewing of the Holy Ghost.*" [16]


 Titus 3:5 does not actually refer to baptism in water. It refers to washing of regeneration which is done in the blood of Christ which was shed to cleanse us from sin. It cannot be used to prove that baptism in water is necessary for salvation.


 Furthermore, even if baptism is not seen as a work of the law, it is a work of righteousness. It is something which we do: therefore it is a work. It is right for us to do: therefore it is a work of righteousness. But this very verse says that it is not by any works of righteousness which we have done that we are saved. Therefore it cannot be by baptism that we are saved (the apparent contradiction between this and I Peter 3:21 will be handled below).


 Titus 3:5, therefore, does not prove the necessity of baptism in water for salvation.


Hebrews 10:22

 *[L]et us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water* (Hebrews 10:22).


 Reference to this verse as proving regeneration, or the new birth, by water baptism ignores the point of the contrasting of that sprinkling which affects the heart, removing from it an evil conscience, and that washing of the body with pure water. It is the sprinkling (with the Blood of Christ- Hebrews 9:14; I Peter 1:2) which touches the heart. The washing of pure water affects the body.

 Paul was careful to distinguish between an outward holiness or circumcision, which was of the flesh (Romans 2:28-29) and an inward holiness, which was of the heart. The true Jew, the true child of Abraham (and therefore the true Christian) has the inward circumcision of the heart, not only the outward, and this is accomplished by the "*sprinkling of the blood of Christ*" (I Peter 1:2), not by a washing in water in the sacrament of baptism (I Peter 3:21).

 As was previously pointed out, the writer of Hebrews shows us that no outward ceremony affects the heart (Hebrews 9:13ff.). He would not, and does not contradict himself here by teaching that the washing of the body in pure water accomplishes an inward cleansing.


 The sprinkling with the Blood of Christ has reference to the Old Testament figure of this with the priests, who had to be sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices before ministering (Leviticus 8:22) and the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices upon the people (Hebrews 9:19; cf. Exodus 24:8) as symbols of that cleansing of the heart which would be effected by the Blood of the Messiah (Isaiah 53), the Lamb of God (Genesis 22:8). The washing in water has reference to the washing of the priests before entering service at the altar (Leviticus 8:6). The former is inward and spiritual, "*of the heart*" (Romans 2:28-29), and the latter is outward and physical, or "*of the flesh*" (Romans 2:28-29).


[17]


 The washing of the body in pure water spoken of in Hebrews 10:22 does refer to water baptism, but does not present it as the means of the cleansing or purifying of the heart. The verse clearly shows that baptism is not this means: sprinkling with the Blood of Christ is, and water baptism is expressly distinguished from sprinkling with the Blood of Christ. Since water baptism is not the means of purifying the heart from sin, it is not the means of regeneration, and it is not necessary for salvation.

 Hebrews 10:22, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.

I Peter 3:19-21

 ... *[B]eing put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also [Christ] went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...* (I Peter 3:18b-21)

 Beside Acts 2:38, this is the next text most strongly depended on by those in favor of the idea that baptism is necessary for salvation. The reason is obvious. This text includes the striking phrase, "*an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism.*" In reference to baptism Paul writes, "*Not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.*" Now the physical baptism is "*the removal of filth of the flesh*" (cf. Hebrews 10:22). But what actually saves is "*the answer of a good conscience toward God.*"

 This shows the close examination between this verse and Hebrews 10:22. That there is another careful distinction between outward cleansing of the body in pure water, and inward cleansing of the conscience. The same distinction is made here in II Peter 3:21, and shows that it is not the outward act which saves but the inward change which is signified by the outward act. Thus Peter refers briefly to the sign of clear conscience, the submitting to baptism, as a short way of referring to the actual thing, the clear conscience. But then for clarification he explains that it is not the sign which saves, but the thing signified: the clear conscience saves, not the physical baptism.



In this context, then, "baptism" is used metaphorically to symbolize a conscience clear before God. It is not said that it is the outward, physical act of baptism which saves, but that it is the good conscience which baptism signifies which saves. This good conscience is achieved by the washing of the conscience by the Blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22; Titus 3:5; I John 1:7; Revelation 1:5), and is acquired entirely by faith (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-10) *before* baptism in water is practiced as a sign of that good conscience (Romans 4:8-11, remembering that baptism is the New Testament counterpart to circumcision; Colossians 2:11-12).



Thus we see that it is deceiving to refer simply to the phrase "[baptism] *now saves us*" without taking it in context with the very careful explanatory phrase which Peter uses, that is, that it is not the outward and physical act which saves, but the inward testimony of a cleansed and good conscience before God, which saves (cf. I John 3:21).



I Peter 3:21, therefore, does not prove the necessity of water baptism for salvation.

Conclusion

"Leaky Bucket" Argument



This concludes the commentary on texts purported to support the doctrine that baptism in water is necessary for salvation. It has been shown that there is no text in the Scripture which proves the necessity of baptism for salvation. We should be careful not to fall prey to the old argument, "Well, no one of them proves it, but if you look at them all together, if you take them in combination, they give such strong evidence of the fact that you really cannot deny it." This is the old "leaky bucket" argument. What it really says is, "Well, if one leaky bucket will not do the job, let us use ten!" But of course ten leaky buckets will carry water no further than one. If none of the texts prove the doctrine, then all of the texts do not prove the doctrine. Water baptism is not necessary for salvation. Period.

The Significance of Baptism



Baptism is the New Testament counterpart to circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12). Circumcision is a sign and seal of the covenant relation of the Old Testament believer to God: the relation of justification, of forgiveness of sins, of regeneration, in short, salvation (Romans 4:8-12). Simply physical circumcision did not cause that relation to God (Romans 2:28-29). The one who entered that relation was commanded to be circumcised as a sign of it (Romans 4:11). [18]



Therefore baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant relation of the New Testament believer to God: the relation of justification, of forgiveness of sins, of regeneration, in short of salvation (Romans 6:1-5; Galatians 3:27; I Peter 3:21). It signifies the identification of the believer with Christ in His death to sin (Romans 6:10-11), in His burial (Romans 6:3-4), and in His resurrection to victorious life (Romans 6:4-5). Simply physical baptism does not cause that relation to God (Romans 2:28-29; Simon Magus was baptized, but did not have or receive that relation- Acts 8:10-24; Romans 9:13ff- which proves that an outward ceremony does not affect the relation of the heart to God); the one who is baptized but does not have faith is not by the mere baptism placed in the relation to God which we call salvation. The one who enters the relation of justification, of forgiveness of sins, of regeneration, that is, of salvation is commanded to be baptized (Acts 10:48) as a sign and seal of his relation to God (Romans 4:11, 6:3-11; Galatians 3:27). Not being baptized does not prevent salvation (Acts 10:47-48; Cornelius and friends were saved before baptism), even though it is a sin not to be baptized.

Is Baptism important?



Of course baptism is important! It is commanded by our Lord (Matthew 28:19) and by Peter (Acts 2:38), and disobedience to this command is sin. This aspect is the primary aspect of its importance: if we do not get baptized, we disobey Christ, and that is sin. The second aspect of its importance is that baptism is the primary sign and seal of the covenant relation between the believer and God: it tells the world that (in the case of adults) the person is a believer, and it tells the Church the same. Thus baptism has this twofold importance. But its third aspect of importance is more inward and personal: it is the way for the believer to most formally express his faith (other than sharing in the Lord's Supper), and this has personal as well as community benefits.



Baptism, then, is important for three reasons: it is commanded, and neglect of it is sin; it is the means of showing the world and the Church that one professes to be a member of God's covenant community (and indeed when it is done in truth it positively shows the person to be a believer); and it expresses faith in Christ, thus having personal and community benefits.



But regardless of this great importance of baptism, we do find that the Scriptures teach that baptism is not necessary to salvation. Like any sin except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (which, in the long run, is a life-long rejection of Christ, and therefore a life-long rejection of the Gospel; this topic is far aside from our present one, and cannot be discussed here), the sin of failing to be baptized is forgiven because of the shed Blood of Jesus Christ applied to the believer (Colossians 1:14; I John 1:7). This is not a suggestion that Christians should not be baptized: I believe they should be. But it is simply a recognition that failure to be baptized does not prevent one from being saved.

How Then Are We Saved?



It seems almost incredible that this question needs to be asked, in the face of the massive biblical testimony on the point. The question amounts to the same thing the Philippian jailor asked: *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* And Paul and Silas give the simple answer, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved"* (Acts 16:31-32).



We are saved solely by God's sovereign grace, through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing we must *do* to gain salvation:



Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28).




The "believing" spoken of in Scripture should not be confused with mere intellectual assent. True belief always meant trust, complete trust. As intellectual assent, belief is bogus (James 2:19). But as true belief, belief always results in the fruit of good works, though it is the faith through which God saves, not the works (James 2:14-26).




For further scriptural teaching on the way of salvation, the reader is invited to study the following passages: John 3:16; Romans 1:16-17, 3:20-28, 4:1-8, 13-16, 23, 25, 5:1, 6:23, 8:30; Galatians 2:16, 21, 3:2-3, 10ff, 24; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-7; I Peter 1:2-9.





We are saved, then, by grace through faith. We are justified by faith without the works of the law, and by God's grace those who are justified are all saved, without exception (Romans 8:30; I Peter 1:9).


 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).*

Conclusion

 The conclusion of this study must be that baptismal regeneration teaches "*another gospel*" by adding a requirement for salvation which Scripture does not teach. But does this mean that all members of groups teaching baptismal regeneration are "*accursed*" (Galatians 1:8-9)? No. Those who, though they now believe otherwise, began by believing that they were saved entirely by grace through faith remain saved (John 10:27-29; I Peter 1:4-9). They are simply in error.

 However, those who have always believed that baptism is necessary for salvation have missed the Gospel and are depending on their own works of righteousness to be saved, contrary to Titus 3:5. They must be prayed for and witnessed to in the hope that they will see the foolishness of trying to be saved by the works of the law or their works of righteousness (Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 3:1ff), and then turn to Christ in full and absolute trust in Him and His grace to forgive and save them utterly.

 It is my belief that most people in groups teaching baptismal regeneration originally believed that they were saved simply by grace through faith, and did not depend on themselves at all. But the others must be shown, lovingly and sensitively, the way to true salvation through the Gospel. Those who once believed the Gospel, but who now have been led to believe otherwise, must be shown how to return to the true Gospel, as Paul showed the Galatians in chapters 2-3.

 Let us give all thanks and glory to the Author and Finisher of our faith, who will continue to keep us by the word of His power, unto salvation, the result of our faith which was given us by Him (John 6:29; Ephesians 2:8-10; I Peter 1:5, 9).

[1] While this essay does not join the argument over the mode of baptism, I cannot neglect this opportunity to urge readers concerned about that issue to obtain James Wilkinson Dale's monumental four-volume work entitled *Classic Baptism, Johannic Baptism, Judaic Baptism, Christic and Patristic Baptism* ([1867] Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., reprint edition). The evidences that Dale offered from classical, Judaic, and Christian Greek usage of the word (baptizô) overwhelmingly demonstrate that the term did not, in and of itself, denote immersion. In fact, baptizô was frequently used to denote a wide variety of acts, many of which bear no resemblance whatsoever to immersion in water.

[2] AT. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Broadman Press, 1933), Volume I, p. 245; see also AT. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Broadman Press, 1934), p. 593.

[3] Reference: Ernest Clevenger, Jr., *A Pocket Bible Ready Reference for Personal Workers* (Parchment Press, rev. ed., 1970).

[4] Reference: A.C. Williams and J. Harvey Dykes, *Ready Answers to Religious Errors* (Williams and Dykes, 1973; 1st edition, 1946).

[5] It might be objected that if "*born of water*" were figurative, then the verse would have an unnecessary repetition. This objection is brought by Williams and Dykes in *Ready Answers* (p. 33), where they write that if "*born of water*" is understood as symbolic of "*born of the Spirit*," then the verse would read, "*born of the spirit and of the Spirit*," which is nonsense. But William and Dykes arrive at this by neglecting one of the meanings of the Greek word used there for "*and*" (kai). *Kai* not

only may mean "and," but can be used as an explicative word to join something unclear to something clear. When it is used in this sense, it can be translated "namely," or "indeed." Thus the verse would read, "born of water, namely, of the Spirit," or perhaps better yet, "born of water, that is, of the Spirit." That this usage is permissible, is seen in Joseph Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, under *kai* (see. 1.3). It therefore would not be nonsense to see "*born of water* as figurative for "*born of the Spirit*."

[6] W.C. Johnson, *Let the Bible Speak About Baptism* (W.C. Johnson, 1971), p. 8.

[7] Reference: James Hastings, editor, "Baptism," *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905); Gerhard Kittel, editor, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976); Everett F. Harrison, editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House, 1975).

[8] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Volume III, pp. 391-392.

[9] A.T. Robertson, *ibid.*

[10] W. C. Johnson, *Let the Bible Speak*, p. 8.

[11] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Volume IV, pp. 361-362; see also his *Grammar*, pp. 591, 593.

[12] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Volume IV, p. 362.

[13] A.C. Williams and J. Harvey Dykes, *Ready Answers*, p. 32.

[14] A.C. Williams and J. Harvey Dykes, *Ready Answers*, p. 32.

[15] A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, Volume IV, p. 298.

[16] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), Volume III, p. 596.

[17] For a complete discussion of the various possible interpretations of this passage, see Franz Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (T&T Clark, 1882), Volume II, pp.174-179. Certainly the washing of the body in pure water here refers to water baptism- only a few commentators have thought otherwise, and the evidence is against them. But that does not mean that it is the means of regeneration. It is outward, and is not the *means* of our being sprinkled with the Blood of Christ.

[18] The question of circumcision of infants is not related here. See J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, pp. 392ff for a discussion of that subject. Not being circumcised did not prevent salvation (Romans 4:10).



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