

The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate

A theological and historical overview of the most contested
subject of the church age.

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Chapter Five

Does Baptism Replace Circumcision?

Evangelical theology is long overdue for a fresh discussion regarding the place of circumcision in the Old Testament plan of salvation. For logical reasons, there will be a repetition of certain concepts in this chapter. The redundancy will be essential to the flow of the argument being set forth. The theory that baptism imparts the saving grace of Christ is most often a product of the belief that circumcision imparted the saving grace of God throughout the Old Testament. It will be the purpose of this chapter to cite the theory of circumcisonal regeneration among Jewish scholars; to show from Scripture that at no time has circumcision been a means of saving grace; and to cite the history of the theory that baptism replaced circumcision in the New Testament. We intend to show that the call of Abraham, the Abrahamic Covenant, and the covenant of circumcision were three separate propositions and should be understood separately as well as compositely. We will observe that the plan of salvation by grace was only a part of the Abrahamic Covenant. In chapter nine of this work we will demonstrate from Scripture the error of the baptismal regeneration theory.

We begin by asking the question: *What was the covenant of circumcision and its relationship to personal salvation in the Old Testament?* If some Christians find it difficult to concentrate on this section of the chapter, they may wish to skip toward the end where Dr. Alexander Carson discusses Col. 2:11, 12. However, it is strongly advised that one familiarize himself with the material in this entire section. We learned in the previous chapters that God's plan of salvation has been the same throughout all divisions of the Bible. The plan is based on a covenant of redemption (the plan of salvation) made within the Trinity before the world began (Titus 1:2).

From a purely historical perspective, we cannot presently resolve the debate concerning whether the Jews considered circumcision to be that which imparted the regenerating power of God, or whether it was a separate covenant of works pointing to (but not imparting) the regenerating grace of God. It can, as we shall observe, be defended both ways from Jewish tradition. But from a purely biblical slant, we will deny that circumcision ever imparted the eternally saving grace of God.

We should consider, for historic perspective, the second century invasion of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes.¹ On the fifteenth day of Kislev, 168 B.C.E., he erected the statue of Zeus in the Jewish temple sanctuary and ordered a pig to be sacrificed on the altar. Jews were forced to join a parade in honor of Dionysus. Antiochus decreed the death penalty for loyalty to the Jewish faith, and thus circumcision

¹ (I Maccabees 1:44-50) "For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah that they should follow the strange laws of the land, and forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days: And pollute the sanctuary and holy ordinances. And people: Set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: That they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: To the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die."

became a capital crime.² Several mothers who had their sons circumcized suffered martyrdom. It is recorded that two women had their babies bound to their breasts and then were cast headlong from the wall.³ That Jews were willing to give their lives for the sake of circumcision implies that, in the minds of some, eternity was at stake.

Yet many Hellenistic Jews did not consider circumcision a matter of eternal life and death. Some of those who participated in athletics at the gymnasium had an operation performed to conceal the fact of their circumcision.⁴ This procedure to obliterate circumcision was called *epispasm*. Circumcision was widely neglected in Hellenistic times, and accordingly, uncircumcision was proclaimed an unforgivable, damnable error of eternal consequence.⁵

Under the persecution of Hadrian we find that the Emperor sought to transform Jerusalem into a pagan city and was determined to destroy Judaism altogether. He also made it a capital crime to follow the practice of circumcision. Roman officials were zealous in capturing the sages and their pupils. It was a reign of terror. The surviving teachers of the Jews held a secret meeting in a garret in Lydda and voted to differentiate between laws of primary and laws of secondary importance. It was determined that the secondary laws could be broken in order to escape death and torture.⁶ This would

² "Jerusalem became a desolate city inhabited by strangers. The Chassidim fled to the hills and sought refuge in the caves. One Sabbath day a thousand of them were surprised in their retreats by soldiers of the king, and all the thousand perished. In the court of the Temple, beside the altar, stood 'the abomination of desolation,' the statue of Zeus, symbol of the triumph of Hellenism and the subjugation of the Hebrew spirit and nation." Rufus Lears, *Israel: A History of the Jewish People*, (Cleaveland: World Publishing Company, 1949), p. 131.

³ (II Maccabees 6:10) "For there were two women brought, who had circumcised their children; whom when they had openly led round about the city, the babes hanging at their breasts, they cast them down headlong from the wall."

⁴ (I Maccabees 1:14, 15) "Whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the heathen: And made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen, and were sold to do mischief."

⁵ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, James H. Charlesworth, Editor (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), Vol. 2, p. 87. (*Book of Jubilees 15:33-34*) "And now I shall announce to you that the sons of Israel will deny this ordinance and they will not circumcise their sons according to all of this law because some of the flesh of their circumcision they will leave in the circumcision of their sons. And all of the sons of Beliar will leave their sons without circumcising just as they were born. And great wrath from the Lord will be upon the sons of Israel because they have left this covenant and have turned aside from his words. And they have provoked and blasphemed inasmuch as they have not done the ordinance of this law because they have made themselves like the Gentiles to be removed and be uprooted from the land. And there is therefore for them no forgiveness or pardon so that they might be pardoned and forgiven from all of the sins of this eternal error." See also *Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), p. 567, an excellent article on the history of Jewish circumcision.

⁶ "Amongst the members present at this assemblage were Akiba, Tarphon, and Joseph the Galilean. Doubtless Ishmael, who resembled R. Joshua in character, was also present on that occasion. The strict elements appear to have considered that every Jew, rather than become guilty of the slightest infringement of the law, however heavy or light, should be ready to die the death of a martyr. Ishmael supported the opposite view. He considered that, outwardly and under compulsion, one might transgress the Law in order to preserve one's life, for the Torah enacted that its followers should live by it and not die through it. The assembly at Lydda, as usual, adopted the middle course, that a difference should be made between important precepts and those which were less weighty. The matter was put to a vote, and the decision was reached, that in order to avoid death by torture, all laws might be broken, with the exception

include circumcision. Learsy documents for us that, *the laws of primary importance were declared to be those that prohibited murder, adultery, and idolatry, and were declared inviolable.*⁷

Action was sometimes taken during the Hadrianic persecution to conceal the appearance of circumcision. But in order to prevent the possibility of obliterating the traces of circumcision altogether, certain procedures were added by the rabbis so that recognition would be unmistakable.⁸

Yet with many Jewish scholars, circumcision was so important that it was allegorically read into the Scriptures where it is not there. F. W. Farrar cites Rabbi Nathan in his view that Adam, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Balaam had all been born circumcised (Abhoth, ch. ii). Farrar gives another example wherein circumcision is substituted in Scripture for the Abrahamic covenant of grace in Jeremiah 33:25— *But for circumcision, heaven and earth could not exist; for it is said, “save for (the sign of) my covenant, I should not have made day and night the ordinances of heaven and earth”* (Nedarim, f. 32, col. 1, referring to Jerem. xxxiii.25). The same remark is made about the whole Law when Rabbi (Juda Hakkadosh) speaks of how great circumcision is, since it is equivalent to all the commandments of the Law, for it is said, *behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you, concerning all* (Heb., above all) *these words* (Ex. xxiv, 8—Nedarim, f. 32, 1). Again, Farrar illustrates the belief that angels so detested an uncircumcised person that, when God spoke to Abraham before circumcision, He spake in Aramaic, which, it appears, the angels do not understand (*Yalkuth Chadash*, f. 117, 3).⁹

Thus, we see both the primary (circumcision saves) and secondary (circumcision testifies) views of circumcision in Jewish history. Yet, from a purely biblical perspective, we know that the Judaizers of Paul’s day did believe that circumcision was essential to personal salvation or eternal life, for they said of Gentile converts, *Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved* (Acts 15:1).

Nevertheless, from a biblical viewpoint, we know that God preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to Abraham with the same terms for Jews and Gentiles—*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all the nations be blessed* (Gal. 3:8). A crucial question is: *When was this gospel presented to Abraham?*

The unconditional gospel of Jesus Christ was received either while he was living in Ur of the Chaldees or when he was first called to leave that city. One thing we know for

of those prohibiting idolatry, adultery, and murder.” H. Graetz, *History of the Jews: From the Reign of Hyrcanus (135 B.C.E.) to the Completion of the Babylonian Talmud* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1893), pp. 423, 424.

⁷ Ibid., Learsy, *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 194.

⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigodan, Editors (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 161. “The rabbis added the requirement of *peri`ah* (laying bare the glans). To this was added a third requirement, *metsitsah* (sucking of the blood). This was originally done by the *mohel* (circumciser). For hygienic reasons, a glass tube with a wad of cotton wool inserted in the middle is now generally employed, or the blood is simply drawn off by the use of some absorbent material.”

⁹ For documentation of the above citations see Frederic W. Farrar, D.D., F.R.S., *The Life and Work of St. Paul* (London, Paris & New York: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1884), pp. 428, 429.

certain, he left that city in saving faith—*By faith Abraham, when he was called...went out* (Heb. 11:8). This refers to Genesis chapter 12 and his original call. This call (Gen. 12:1-3) was accompanied by a package of promises:

1. I will make of thee a great nation.
2. I will bless thee.
3. I will make thy name great.
4. Thou shalt be a blessing.
5. I will bless them that bless thee.
6. I will curse him that curseth thee.
7. In thee shall the families of the earth be blessed.

Verse one describes this call of Abraham as past tense. He received this call while living in Ur of the Chaldees. The call of Abraham and the covenant with Abraham are separate propositions. The Call was conditional and required Abraham to:

1. Leave his country.
2. Leave his kindred.
3. Leave his father's house.
4. Proceed to a promised land.

Abraham moved from Ur of the Chaldees in disobedience. Actually, his father led him out of town with Lot, Abraham's nephew, and took up residence in Haran.¹⁰ The family remained in Haran until Terah died (Gen. 11:31, 32). Terah probably preferred this city because he was a worshiper of other gods than Jehovah (Joshua 24:2). Terah was seventy years old when Abraham was born, but was two-hundred and five when he died in Haran. Therefore, the family must have lived in Haran for many years in disobedience to God's call.

Abraham finally did follow God further, but it was not in complete obedience. He was told to leave his kindred but he took his nephew, Lot (Gen. 12:5). When Abraham arrived in the land that God had promised to show him, God appeared again and added an eighth promise to the package: *Unto thy seed will I give this land* (Gen. 12:7).

But when famine came to the *Promised Land*, Abraham sought security in the land of Egypt (Gen. 12:10). He introduced his wife to Pharaoh as his sister. When the Egyptian king took Sarah into his house with plans for marriage, God put a plague upon him (Gen. 12:11-20). Abraham and his wife used this same routine again in Gen. 20 with Abimelech, king of Gerar.¹¹

There is a great difference between making a promise and repeating a promise.¹² There is a great difference between the making of a promise and the subsequent

¹⁰ Haran was approximately 700 miles N.W. of Ur and about 60 mi. from the Euphrates River. The city was a center of moon god worship.

¹¹ Abraham's son, Isaac, will follow this same bad example by lying about his wife Rebekah (Gen. 26).

¹² Twersky incorrectly affirms that, "in connection with circumcision, thirteen covenants were made with our ancestor Abraham. *And I will make My covenant between Me and thee* (Gen 17:2); *As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee* (Gen. 17:4); *And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee* (Gen. 17:7); *for an everlasting covenant* (ibid.); *And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant* (Gen. 17:9);

illustrations of that promise.¹³ When Abraham and Lot returned to the land of Canaan and parted from each other, God reappeared to Abraham repeating the promise, adding that He would make his *seed as the dust of the earth* (Gen. 13:16). We need to ask a fundamental question at this point. When did God's oath to Abraham become immutably based upon the fact that God cannot lie? We find the answer in the sixth chapter of Hebrews as follows:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he **swore by himself, Saying, Surely** blessing I will bless thee, and **multiplying** I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the **immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:** That by two immutable things, in which *it was impossible for God to lie*, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil (Heb. 6:13-19). *Emphasis added.*

The two immutable things that confirmed the promise were God's oath and His Word. An unconditional promise from God is *sure, confirmed, and immutable* the very first time God makes it because it is impossible for Him *to lie*.

In Genesis 15:1-21 God appeared to Abraham again and said, *Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward* (vs. 1). Once again God promised to multiply Abraham's seed as the stars of heaven (15:5). In vs. 6 the Bible says: *and he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness*. In the New Testament, the word *counted* is translated *imputed*. Today we often use the word *blame*. The plan of salvation involves three major imputations or blames:

1. The sin of Adam is blamed upon the human race (Rom. 3:23; 5:12).
2. The sin of the race is blamed upon Christ (Isa. 53:5, 6; Heb. 2:9; II Cor. 5:14-21; I Pet. 2:24).
3. The righteousness of Christ is blamed upon the believing sinner (Phil. 3:9; Jas. 2:23; Rom. 4:6, 8, 11, 22, 23, 24).

It is in this third blame that the believing sinner becomes clothed with the righteousness of Christ (II Cor. 5:21). The Bible declares that all sinners are naked before God (Gen. 3:10; Heb. 4:13). Some will attempt to deal with sin by applying their own spiritual clothes, but the best of this wardrobe is as filthy rags in the sight of God (Isa. 64:6).

This is my covenant which ye shall keep (Gen. 17:10); *And it shall be a token of a covenant* (Gen. 17:11); *And My covenant shall be in your flesh* (Gen. 17:13), *for an everlasting covenant* (ibid.); *He hath broken My covenant* (Gen. 17:14); *And I will stablish My covenant with him* (Gen. 17:19); *for an everlasting covenant* (ibid.); *But my covenant I will establish with Isaac* (Gen. 17:21), (see MN, III, 49)." Isadore Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides (Mishneh Torah)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 52, 53.

¹³ Circumcision was a token of a promise that was already sure and certain apart from and prior to any ritual.

Abraham did not lack belief at this point, but he did lack assurance. There is a difference between believing and knowing, as the Apostle John writes: *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life...* (I Jn. 5:13a). The Bible does not teach that salvation faith equals a total absence of doubt. Even John the Baptist became agnostic as he waited for his execution and sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* (Matt. 11:3).¹⁴ So also, Abraham, standing in the imputed righteousness of Christ, asks: *Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?* (Gen. 15:8).

Now, God was telling the absolute truth back in chapter twelve where His promises were sure and unconditional at that point. Nothing can make those promises more unconditional or more certain to be fulfilled. However, God was going to teach Abraham to be more certain in his own knowledge.

First, God instructed Abraham to take a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove and one young pigeon. He was to cut everything but the birds in half, piling them beside each other. And when the scavenger birds flew down upon the carnage, Abraham drove them away (Gen. 15:9-11). And as the sun was going down, God put Abraham into a deep sleep. God then prophesied the four-hundred year sojourn in Egypt and assured Abraham that it would not be in his lifetime, but after four generations they shall return with great substance (vss. 13-16).

When it became dark, God passed between the two piles of carnage by Himself (vs. 17) in the form of a smoking fire pot and a torch. This is reminiscent of an ancient sacrificial ritual performed to consummate a contract between two parties. It would require both parties to join hands and walk together between the pieces. This constituted a pledge of their commitment to keep the terms of this contract, in the presence of blood, suffering and death. It is known in the Bible as a *covenant of blood* (cf. Jer. 34:18-19). The fact that God passed between the parts alone illustrates the unconditional nature of this covenant. But the covenant was already unconditional from chapter twelve and was only being illustrated by the ceremony of chapter fifteen. Reading the life of Abraham makes it easy to know that this covenant was not in any way contingent upon Abraham's faithfulness. This object lesson helped Abraham's understanding, but it didn't make the promises of God more true or more unconditional than they were in the twelfth chapter.

And now we come to the seventeenth chapter of Genesis where God repeats the covenant. If the covenant was sure, confirmed, and immutable, it never needed to be renewed but only repeated and reillustrated.¹⁵ Abraham was ninety years old when God appeared to him again. This time God gave Abraham something to help him remember. He changed his name from *Abram* to *Abraham* (17:5). God called it an *everlasting covenant*, which it had been since chapter twelve. God then promised that the covenant would be established with Abraham's seed after him, which had been true since chapter twelve (vs.7).

¹⁴ In the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke all of Christ's closest friends and associates had fallen into a state of absolute doubt.

¹⁵ How many times do Christians repeat the broken bread and the cup of wine in remembrance of Christ. These do not impart life, but are repeated illustrations of the sacrifice of Christ which has already imparted life.

Then God made another covenant with Abraham which was conditional while, at the same time, serving as a reminder and illustration of the unconditional covenant. The unconditional covenant is one that God alone keeps (like that of the rainbow). The covenant of circumcision is one that man keeps—

This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you (Gen. 17:10,11).

Circumcision served as a conditional covenant of works as well as a *token* of the unconditional covenant of grace given in chapter twelve.¹⁶

We can be absolutely certain of several things at this point. Abraham was not regenerated by his circumcision. Saving faith was not imparted to him by his circumcision. Circumcision did not make the promise of God more immutable, more sure, or more confirmed than it was in chapter twelve. It was an experience that made God's unconditional promise also unforgettable.

Consider the statement about circumcision in 17:13b, *and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant*. Every Christian needs to decide if vs. 13 proclaims circumcision to be an everlasting covenant, or if it proclaims the rite to be a *token, sign, or seal* of an everlasting covenant. It will help if one realizes that the everlasting covenant cannot be abolished, but that circumcision of the flesh has definitely been abolished (Gal. 5:1-4, 6; Eph. 2:11-15; Col. 3:11).

God had said to Abraham: *in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 12:1-3). The seed of Abraham has blessed all of the families of the earth in the Person of Jesus Christ who said: *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad* (Jn. 8:56). Paul affirmed that the promised Seed was Jesus Christ when he wrote: *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ* (Gal. 3:16). This promise became certain and unconditional to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. The covenant of circumcision did not exist until five chapters later. Abraham was eternally saved through the faith he had in Jesus Christ before he ever received the covenant of circumcision—

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also (Rom. 4:11).¹⁷

¹⁶ The rainbow was a *token* of God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12). It was not the covenant but a *token* of the covenant (9:13, 17). The privilege of serving God on Mt. Sinai was a *token* to Moses that God was with him (Ex. 3:12). The blood of the first Passover lamb became a *token* on the doorposts of the Israelite's houses. (Ex. 12:13; 13:16). Aaron's rod became a *token* against the murmurings of rebels (Nu. 17:10). The scarlet thread in the window of Rahab the harlot became a token that she and her family would not be destroyed with Jericho (Josh. 2:12). See Ps. 86:13; Mk. 14:44; Phil. 1:28; II Thess. 3:17. The word is *owth* in the Hebrew and means a sign, a monument, a beacon, a flag. Its root is *uwth* meaning to assent or consent. It is God's way of saying *amen* to something that is already true.

¹⁷ A debate has existed throughout church history regarding the meaning of the words *sign* and *seal*. It will not be necessary to discuss all of the possible usages of these two words. What we must

It was prior to his circumcision that Abraham became the father of all them that believe, including all those who were never circumcised—

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised (Rom. 4:12).

This is the exact same righteousness of faith that Noah, Enoch, and Abel had before him (Heb. 11:4-7). There were not two plans of salvation from Genesis seventeen onward—one of circumcision and one without.

Now the covenant of circumcision was a law of works, and therefore not a part of the plan of salvation for Abraham—

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, *there is* no transgression. Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all (Rom. 4:13-16).

The plan of salvation did not change in chapter seventeen when God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. In many great theological works of both Catholic and Reformed traditions, it seems that the covenant of circumcision is the actual covenant of grace. But we see that Abraham was standing by faith in the covenant of grace five chapters before Genesis 17:10-14. We should not conclude that any subsequent covenant made with Abraham was the covenant of salvation by grace. Neither should we conclude that the covenant of grace or plan of salvation is a composite of all of the agreements and promises made with Abraham.

The Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12, 13, and 15 contains the plan of salvation, yet it is more than just that. It was an unconditional covenant (Gen. 15), but the covenant of circumcision was a conditional covenant of works. When God passed alone through the two mounds of animal parts in Genesis 15, he proclaimed that the promises of His covenant with Abraham were conditioned solely upon the faithfulness of His own promises. It was a covenant that only God could keep.

Not so with the covenant of circumcision. It was a covenant that Abraham and his descendents were to keep in order to inherit its blessings—*This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised* (Gen. 17:10). The promises of chapters 12-15 can only be broken by God Who cannot break a promise. But the covenant of circumcision can be broken by man (17:14). The covenant promises of chapters 12-15 were confirmed before circumcision and cannot be broken or added unto— *...though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereunto* (Gal. 3:15). And, *for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it reckoned?*

determine is how they are not being used in this chapter. They do not mean that Abraham's personal salvation was unconfirmed and unreal prior to the *sign* and *seal*.

When he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision (Rom. 4:9).

The covenant of circumcision can be amended to become part of the Mosaic covenant of works. Actually, the covenant of circumcision was not added to the Mosaic Law, but the Mosaic Law was added to the covenant of circumcision (Ex. 12:44, 48; Lev. 12:3). But there can be no additions to the covenant of salvation made with Abraham (Gal. 3:15). Abraham's covenant of circumcision became a part of the Law of Moses. There were not two physical circumcisions for Israel from the Law of Moses, but only one; having amended the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham. Abraham's circumcision was four hundred and thirty years before the Law of Moses (Gal. 3:17), but from the time of Moses anyone who is circumcised is obligated to keep the whole Law, which is impossible (Gal. 3:3; Rom. 2:25). So, if there has never been a law which could have given life, then there never was and never will be a time when circumcision can give eternal life to one who receives it—

for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe (Gal. 3:21b-22).

Yet the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12-15 cannot be broken or annulled—

And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect (Gal. 3:17).

Nevertheless, the Mosaic Law can be annulled and broken—

For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the Law made nothing perfect...(Heb. 7:18, 19a).

Though the covenant of circumcision was a covenant of the flesh which could be broken, it was indeed a commandment of the law of God and served several purposes, two of which we will mention. It was a conditional covenant, and yet it was also a badge or symbol of the unconditional covenant. However, there were consequences for being uncircumcised—

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant (Gen. 17:14).¹⁸

The penalty for violating the covenant of circumcision was physical death (not eternal death), either executed by God or by civil authority.¹⁹

¹⁸ See such expressions as “from his people” (Lev. 17:4, 10; Num. 15:30), “from Israel” (Ex. 7:15; Num. 19:13), “from the congregation of Israel” (Ex. 12:19); and instead of “that soul,” in Lev. 17:4-9 (cf. Ex. 30:33,38), we find “that man.”

¹⁹ Ex. 31:14 equates the phrase *cut off* as being put to death by civil authority. It is very interesting to study the histories of those who were put to death in Christian history for withholding baptism from their infants. It was assumed that infant baptism replaced circumcision and that disobedience required the death penalty. This concept will be discussed at length in chapter seven of this present work

We must not fail to distinguish between the theocratic death penalty and eternal condemnation. In Ex. 4:24-26 God was going to kill Moses for having failed to circumcise his son. Moses' wife, Zipporah, circumcised the boy and threw the bloody foreskin at Moses' feet and he lived. But, if Moses had died at that moment, he would have gone to Paradise, because Moses was in salvation faith when he left Egypt the first time—

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:24).

To illustrate the difference between the theocratic death penalty and eternal damnation, the writer of Hebrews clearly describes a saint who forsakes the assembly as one who is worthy of physical death but who is, at the same time, eternally sanctified by the unconditional covenant of salvation. Hebrews 10:10-14 describes the saved person as sanctified *once for all* and *forever* by the *offering of the body of Jesus Christ*. This same saint is warned not to forsake the visible assembly of God in verse 25. If he does forsake the assembly, no sacrifice (including the sacrifice of Christ) will protect him from what could happen next (vs. 26). What will happen to this saint is described as the *judgment* and *fiery indignation* of God which shall devour (vs. 27). Now the writer of Hebrews clearly connects what he is saying to the Mosaic theocratic death penalty: *He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses* (vs. 28).²⁰ We are not guaranteed that the unfaithful church member is going to drop dead at the hand of God, but there is a guarantee that the unfaithful are worthy of such a death—*of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy* (vs. 29). The fuller context here is speaking of much more than just unfaithfulness to the local assembly, but for present purposes we will discuss this one point to illustrate our case. The saint who violates this precept, whether he knows it or not—

...hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace (vs. 29b).

This man is in trouble with God. He is cut off from communion with God, cut off from a list of blessings from God, cut off from fellowship with the saints, cut off from rewards in heaven, perhaps cut off from physical life or health on earth, but *he was sanctified* when he once accepted the grace of Christ. The phrase *wherewith he was sanctified* refers this disobedient saint back to verses 10-14 wherein God has *perfected forever them that are sanctified*.²¹

Likewise, Israelites were to be cut off from citizenship in physical Israel, with all of the privileges of that citizenship, if they were not circumcised. They were supposed to

(cf. Ex. 12:15, 19; Lev. 7:20, 21, 25, etc.). In Lev. 17:9,10 the phrase *cut off* refers to an act of God in destroying a violator of His commandment.

²⁰ This verse is not authorizing the visible church to execute unfaithful members, but it is a warning of the judgment of God. cf. I Cor. 11:30 "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

²¹ In II Pet. 1 the saint is told to add to his faith: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. But in vs. 9 he is told that if he lacks these additions he is "blind and cannot see afar off" and "hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." This man is in trouble, cut off from many things, but not cut off from eternal life.

be disqualified from eating the Passover (Ex. 12:48).²² But they were not necessarily cut off from eternal salvation by the absence of circumcision.²³ Under the leadership of Moses, children were not circumcised during the forty-year wilderness journey. Does this mean that no one in Israel was truly saved during those forty years?²⁴ What was the fate of any who died in infancy? Were they not truly Jews?

In chapter one of the book named for him, Joshua prepares these uncircumcised Israelites (who had supposedly kept the Passover for thirty-eight years) to cross the Jordan River into the land of rest—*Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land* (1:13). In chapter 2, Rahab the harlot says of the uncircumcised Israelites: *I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all of the inhabitants of the land faint because of you* (vs.9). The two spies return to Joshua saying: *Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us* (vs. 24). In chapter 3 Joshua presents proof to the people that God is with them as the waters of the Jordan part, enabling the people to cross on dry ground (vss. 9-17). As the nation passes over the Jordan, a stone monument is built in the midst of the river as a memorial that God was with the nation when they crossed the river and, *On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life* (4:14). The demonstration of God's mighty presence among the people melted the hearts of the inhabitants of the land (5:1). This all happened while the Children of Israel were in uncircumcision. Subsequent to this, God commands Joshua to circumcise all male Israelites, for this had not been practiced throughout the forty-year wilderness journey (5:2-9).

Absolutely nowhere in God's word is it stated that a soul becomes eternally condemned if he refuses circumcision, or that circumcision places one into the covenant

²² We know that the children of Israel in the wilderness journey were commanded to celebrate the Passover beginning with the second year after they came out of Egypt. It was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib (Nu. 9:1-14; Deut. 16:1-6). However, at the end of the Journey, the Israelites, with their infants at Horeb, had not been circumcised; nor were they when they entered into covenant with the Lord under the leadership of Moses (Deut. 29:10-15; Josh. 5:7-9).

²³ Concerning the circumcision of a proselyte, Moore writes: "The significance of its initiatory rite was not entrance into a religious community, it was naturalization in the Jewish nation, that is—since the idea of nationality was racial rather than political—adoption into the Jewish race, the convert entering into all the rights and privileges of the born Jew and assuming all the corresponding obligations." Moore also cites the regenerationist view of circumcision and baptism when he refers to Rabbi (Judah, the Patriarch) who marked "the correspondence between the admission of a proselyte and the experience of Israel. As the Israelites came into the covenant only by three things, circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice, precisely so the proselyte comes into the covenant by the same three things. For the proselyte is equally a 'son of the covenant' with the born Jew." George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), Vol. I, pp. 232, 234.

²⁴ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co, 1993), pp. 344, 448, 453. Dillow gives a scholarly argument that many who left Egypt after the first Passover were saved Israelites. The price they paid for unbelief was that they experienced physical death in the wilderness without living to see the promised land.

of saving grace.²⁵ The circumcision required of Abraham is the same as required of Moses, and yet the Mosaic law never placed anyone into the covenant of saving grace by an act of works.²⁶ If there ever was a time when circumcision could bring one into the covenant of saving grace, then Abraham could not have been the father of all uncircumcised believers from the time before he was circumcised—

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also (Rom. 4:11).

The covenant of circumcision is not the covenant of grace.²⁷ There were men living who were left out of the covenant of circumcision, who were nevertheless in the covenant of grace, such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Enos, Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Melchizedek, Lot, and others.²⁸ The covenant of salvation was made with Christ in eternity past, as the federal head of all believers in Him (Titus 1:2). That the temporal blessings of the covenant of circumcision belonged to Abraham's natural seed is beyond question. But we deny that the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant of salvation by grace belonged to Abraham's seed after the flesh by physical circumcision.²⁹ God, who cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), guaranteed that the promises made to Abraham would be established in Isaac before the boy was even conceived (Gen. 17:18,19).³⁰ The same God was not lying when he declared that the identical promises were intended for Jacob

²⁵ In II Sam. 12 Nathan the prophet tells King David that his first son with Bathsheba will die (vs. 14). On the seventh day the child dies (apparently uncircumcised) (vs. 18). Yet, David is certain that he will see his son in the hereafter when he says, "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (vs. 23).

²⁶ We must also note that circumcision was to be forced upon anyone bought with money or of any stranger in a Jewish house which is not of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 17:12). This same principle is repeated in Ex. 12:44, 48. It has never been God's will to compel a salvation decision upon anyone.

²⁷ Ibid., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 481...Irenaeus connected the New Testament circumcision made without hands (Col. 2:11) to the circumcision of the heart spoken by Jeremiah (Jer. 4:3,4). He then uses Lot, Noah and Enoch as examples of circumcised hearts before the establishment of circumcision of the flesh... "Moreover, all the rest of the multitude of those righteous men who lived before Abraham, and of those patriarchs who preceded Moses, were justified independently of the things above mentioned [works of the law], and without the law of Moses." (*Against Heresies*, Book IV. Chap xvi.1, 2).

²⁸ In the third century A.D., Cyprian will make this precise argument (*The Treatises of Cyprian*, 12, 8). He spoke of Jeremiah's reference to the circumcision of the heart (Jer. 4:3, 4) and Moses' prophecy of the circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6). Cyprian then draws a direct connection from these passages to the reference to circumcision made without hands in Col. 2:11. He argues that Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek had the salvation that results from circumcision of the heart, yet none of these men had the circumcision of the flesh. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third Century*, Rev. Alexander Roberts, D. D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., Editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), Vol. 5, p. 510.

²⁹ Question: If the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant were conferred and confirmed by fleshly circumcision, then why did not Ishmael receive title to them when Abraham circumcised him (Gen. 17:25)? If circumcision constituted a promise from God that the child would be saved, then why were so many thousands of circumcised Jews in Christ's day declared to be lost? Why did Paul declare them to be lost? Why? Because circumcision never did confer eternal life on anyone and never constituted a promise that the recipient would someday trust the grace of God for salvation.

³⁰ Abraham's faith that God would raise up Isaac from the dead after being sacrificed was based on God's promise to Abraham about Isaac before the boy was ever conceived (Heb. 11 17-19).

before he was born (Gen. 25:23). The promise of eternal life was totally independent of circumcision from before the creation of the world, as the Apostle Paul stated: *In hope of eternal life which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began* (Titus 1:2).

We also deny that salvation came to Abraham's natural seed of Jews or Gentiles through a physical, fleshly ordinance. Regardless of whether one is Jew or Gentile, he becomes Abraham's spiritual seed without circumcision made with hands. Many Jews who believed on Christ had always thought that their souls were free because they were of the fleshly seed of Abraham. Jesus said: *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32). They responded by saying: *We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?* Christ's response was that *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed* (vs. 33). Jesus knew that He was not talking to truly saved Jews and proclaimed: *I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you* (John 8:31-37). The spiritual promise that Abraham would be the heir of the world in eternity was not given to Abraham or his seed through the righteousness of the law of circumcision, but through the righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:13). Abraham possessed this righteousness of faith before the covenant of circumcision (Rom. 4:10, 11). The same is true of all Gentiles who are the spiritual seed of Abraham (vss. 11, 16).

The Apostle Paul wanted so passionately to see the fleshly seed of Abraham saved that he was willing to be cursed in exchange for their conversion (Rom. 9:1-3). Paul then began to list the temporal privileges of being a natural Jew after Abraham's fleshly seed:

who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen (vss. 4, 5).

Yet these same people with such great blessings are eternally lost, and Paul longs for their salvation (vss. 1-3).

But then Paul contrasted spiritual Israel from fleshly Israel when he said: *for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel* (vs. 6:b). Paul continued by describing how God selected Isaac, and then Jacob, to be the forefathers of the promised seed of Abraham. God did this so that He could make known the riches of His glory to the saved (vs. 23). Just as there was nothing in Isaac or Jacob to recommend God's grace to them, so there is nothing in saved Jews or Gentiles which deserve the saving grace of God—

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved (9:23-27).

It was a pure act of God's sovereign, common grace to be born into fleshly Israel—

Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people (Deut. 9:4-6).

But it is an act of God's saving grace (received by faith) that makes one within fleshly Israel a part of the remnant of truly saved Israel—

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law (Rom. 9:30-32a).

When *they of the circumcision* came to Corinth they taught that there was something redemptive about being of the physical seed of Abraham. Paul responded to their foolishness by saying: *are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I* (II Cor. 11:22). On this point Paul had to repeat himself many times but he never tired of doing so—*To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe* (Phil. 3:1b). He called Jews who had confidence in the flesh *dogs* and *evil workers* (vs. 2). Then he contrasted spiritual Israel with Israel after the flesh when he said:

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Phil. 3:3-6).

Paul discounted all of these things as a grounds for entering the covenant of saving grace—

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phil. 3:7-9).

Paul became a recipient of the covenant of saving grace on the same ground that Abraham did when the latter became the father of all them that believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised (Rom. 4:11, 12).

There has been an argument throughout church history that the “sacrament” of baptism replaces circumcision in the New Testament. The argument is almost always as follows: *Just as circumcision placed an infant into the Abrahamic covenant of grace, so also does baptism place the infant of Christian parents into the bond of the covenant of grace.*

But we are challenged to observe that baptism was used and in force before circumcision was abolished, which was not until the death of Christ. *They of the circumcision* at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 were baptized members of the first church of that city. It was radically incumbent upon the apostles to refute the heresy that Gentiles must be circumcised in order to be saved. It should seem strange to the reader that these Jews had never heard that the baptism of these Gentiles replaced circumcision. It was argued that converts should be both circumcised and baptized. This debate plagued the church throughout the New Testament. What a perfect time it would have been to simply explain the substitution of baptism for circumcision. It was *no small disputation and dissension* (15:2), resulting in a letter of clarification being sent to Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, but with no explanation that baptism was the reason that circumcision was not incumbent upon Gentile converts.

When Paul went to great lengths to explain that circumcision avails nothing he missed a tremendous opportunity to explain that baptism was the procedure that made circumcision obsolete. To the Galatians he said: *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love* (Gal. 5:6). It could have added much clarity to the subject if he had just said: *but by baptism which replaces circumcision.* Paul told the Colossians that in Christ, *There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all* (Col. 3:11). This would have been a strategic time to explain that baptism replaces circumcision in the Church of Christ.

When addressing the heresy of *they of the circumcision*, Paul said to the Corinthians: *And so ordain I in all churches* (I Cor. 7:17b). Surely he would have mentioned how baptism had been ordained to replace circumcision, but he did not. Without even mentioning baptism he ordains:

Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God (I Cor. 7:18-19).

When circumcising Timothy for the sake of the Jews, Paul could have noted that his partner was already baptized in place of circumcision—but he did not. When the same apostle refused to circumcise Titus, he could have explained that the young evangelist was already baptized in place of circumcision—but he did not. Again, when Paul appointed Titus to ordain elders in every city of Crete, he listed some of the qualifications that Titus was to look for in such leaders as follows:

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake (Titus 1:9-11).

These heretics were teaching baptism and circumcision. Titus could have been instructed to teach these elders how to explain that baptism had replaced circumcision—but he was not.

We have just cited several instances where the shift could have been explained, but was not. Nevertheless, we are reminded that it is dangerous to argue from what the Bible does not say, so we must be cautious. We must also remind ourselves that in the theory which affirms that baptism saves us or imparts the saving grace of God to us, we are instructed that the substitution of baptism for circumcision was so self-evident that it didn't need to be explained in the Bible. Theologians throughout church history constantly used the phrases: *it is only natural to infer* or *it must logically be presumed* when referring to the substitution of baptism for circumcision. Calvin makes this very point forthrightly by saying:

Now, the first access to God, the first entrance to immortal life, is the remission of sins. Hence it follows, that this corresponds to the promise of our cleansing in baptism...We have, therefore, a spiritual promise given to the fathers in circumcision, similar to that which is given to us in baptism, since it figured to them both the forgiveness of sins and the mortification of the flesh. Besides, as we have shown that Christ, in whom both of these reside, is the foundation of baptism, so must he also be the foundation of circumcision. For he is promised to Abraham, and in him all nations are blessed. To seal this grace, the sign of circumcision is added.

4. There is now no difficulty in seeing where the two signs agree and wherein they differ. The promise, in which we have shown that the power of the signs consists, is one in both—viz. **The promise of the paternal favour of God, of forgiveness of sins, and eternal life. And the thing figured is one and the same—viz. Regeneration.** The foundation on which the completion of these things depends is one in both. Wherefore there is no difference in the internal meaning, from which the whole power and peculiar nature of the sacrament is to be estimated. The only difference which remains is in the external ceremony, which is the least part of it, the chief part consisting in the promise and the thing signified. Hence we may conclude, that everything applicable to circumcision applies also to baptism, excepting always the difference in the visible ceremony. To this analogy and comparison we are led by that rule of the apostle, in which he enjoins us to bring every interpretation of Scripture to the analogy of faith (Rom. 12:3-6). **And certainly in this matter the truth may almost be felt.** For just as circumcision, which was a kind of badge to the Jews, assuring them that they were adopted as the people and family of God, was their first entrance into the Church, while they, in their turn, professed their allegiance to God, so now we are initiated by baptism, so as to be enrolled among his people, and at the same time swear unto his name. **Hence it is incontrovertible, that baptism has been substituted for circumcision, and performs the same office** [emphasis added].³¹

³¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), Vol. II, pp. 530, 531.

Calvin is drawing his conclusion *incontrovertibly* from his interpretation of Colossians 2:11, 12. This is the controversial one-of-a-kind passage that has been the pivotal point of debate for almost two thousand years—

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11, 12).

Calvin is so certain that the heart is circumcised in ritual baptism that he uses Titus 3:5 as his commentary on the Colossian passage—

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost (3:5).³²

Confusion regarding the Colossian passage exists as far back as Justin Martyr in the second century. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* [Chapter XIX] he asserts that Christian baptism does not have its roots in O. T. ablutions and, *Even you, who are the circumcised according to the flesh, have need of our circumcision; but we having the latter, do not require the former.* In defense of Christian circumcision of the heart Justin refers to Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot and Melchizedek. It didn't seem to connect with Justin that these men had neither fleshly circumcision nor baptism, though they had spiritual circumcision.³³ We can see his utter confusion on the matter in the forty-third chapter of his *Dialogue with Trypho* when he affirms:

And we, who have approached God through Him, have received not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism, since we were sinners, by God's mercy; and all men may equally obtain it.³⁴

It would seem then, that Justin sees circumcision of the heart and justification as independent of ritual altogether in the O. T. yet completely contingent on ritual baptism in the New Testament.

During the Protestant Reformation there were some Christians who contended that baptism does not regenerate the sinner. They believed in justification by faith, and they affirmed that faith was a prerequisite to scriptural baptism. This position is known as *believer's baptism*. Key reformers considered the doctrine of believer's baptism to be an even greater threat to the purity of the church than Romanism itself. Calvin discards them as *frenzied spirits* who *continue to raise, great disturbance in the Church on account of paedobaptism*. He comments that their arguments are *not founded on the institution of God, but was introduced merely by human presumption and depraved curiosity, and afterwards, by a foolish facility, rashly received in practice*. He further

³² *Ibid.*, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. II, p. 515... “that we are circumcised, and put off the old man, after we are buried in Christ by baptism (Col. ii.12). And in this sense, in the passage which we formerly quoted, he calls it ‘the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost’ (Tit. iii. 5). We are promised, first, the free pardon of sins and imputation of righteousness; and secondly, the grace of the Holy Spirit, to form us again to newness of life.”

³³ *Ibid.*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, pp. 203, 204.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 216.

describes their position as destitute of Christ's authority and as an insult to the Savior Himself. He says: *let us beware of discarding the sacred institution of God, and thereby insulting their author.*³⁵ Describing his own position on the matter, Calvin says: *In the first place, then, it is a well-known doctrine, and one as to which all the pious are agreed.*³⁶

Luther, in the preface to his commentary on Galatians, had even stronger words for those who taught that *baptism is nothing unless the person is a believer*. He argues that from the "believer's baptism" position *it must follow that all the works of God are nothing if a man is not good.*³⁷ He illustrates his point by affirming: *If baptism, which is a work of God, ceases to be a work of God when man is evil, it follows that the married state, the office of magistrate, and the station of a servant, which are works of God, are no longer works of God because men are evil*. He then compares baptism with the common grace of God upon the entire human race as an argument that baptism regenerates an unbelieving soul—*The ungodly have the sun, moon, earth, water, air, and all that is subject to man; yet since they are not godly, it must follow that the sun is not the sun, and moon, earth, water, air, are not what they are*. Luther is characterizing the position of "believer's baptism" as teaching that nothing about God is true prior to belief, saying that those who held this position, *had bodies and souls before they were rebaptized, but because they were not godly, they had not real bodies and souls*. Next, he argues that their position implies that there are no institutions of God prior to belief, thus confessing themselves as bastards if their parents were not saved when first married—*Similarly, their parents were not really married—as they admit—because they were not re-baptized, and therefore the Anabaptists themselves are all illegitimate and their parents were adulterers and fornicators. Yet they inherit their parents' property, although they admit themselves to be illegitimate and without right of inheritance*. Luther describes the advocates of believer's baptism as not only *possessed by demons, but demons themselves possessed by worse demons*. He equates this position with the error of the Papists, describing them as *foxes tied together by the tails, even though their*

³⁵ Contemporary reformed theologian R. C. Sproul uses much the same wording when answering the question: "Would you encourage an adult who has just come to Christ to be baptized if he or she had already been baptized?" His answer is: "The reason I wouldn't encourage them is that if indeed this is the sign of God's promise that certain things would happen if you put your trust in Christ, why would you now come before God and say 'would you run that promise by me again?' to do so in a sense casts a shadow on the integrity of that original promise that God has just fulfilled in full magnificence. Logically, I would say the repetition of the act would be a thinly veiled insult to God's integrity, though I fully recognize that not one person in a million who undergoes a second baptism intends it to be an insult. R.C. Sproul, *Now That's A Good Question* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), pp. 341, 342.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. II, p. 529.

³⁷ Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: Based on Lectures Delivered at the University of Wittenberg in the Year 1531 and First Published in 1535* (London: James Clarke & Co. LTD., 1956), pp. 18, 19. See also, *Luther's Works: Church and ministry III*, Eric W. Gritsch, Editor; Helmut T. Lehmann, General Editor (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Vol. 41, p.336. Luther often imputes words to the one he is writing against and then lets these imagined words become a self-evident refutation. This has never been a valid form of logical argumentation. He uses this method of logic with rebaptizers and also the Pope of Rome: "*Oh, no, speaks the most hellish father, Christ is drunken, raving, and mad; he has forgotten what great power he, with the keys, gave me to bind—namely, I have the authority to bind and to forbid that:*"

heads look in opposite directions.³⁸ He says that this teaching is *against our one and only Savior Christ* and felt that if Anabaptists were to be saved, God could do it through some other plan than that proclaimed by Scripture—

Then there was talk about the blood of the Anabaptists that Ferdinand had spilled and about the constancy of the Anabaptists. Peter Weller asked whether they would be saved. The doctor [Martin Luther] replied, “We judge according to the gospel: he who doesn’t believe in Christ can’t be saved (John 3:18). Therefore we must be sure that they are in error, etc. However, God can also act outside the prescribed rule, although we can’t judge otherwise.”³⁹

Luther concludes his comments regarding the advocates of believer’s baptism by saying: *Let him who can, then, hold fast to this one article; and let the rest, who make shipwreck, be driven by the wind and waves until they either return to the ship or swim to the shore.*⁴⁰

The late Princeton theologian Benjamin Warfield affirmed the probability that Jewish proselyte baptism and Christian baptism were one because the nation of Israel and the Church of Christ are the same entity.⁴¹

It might be *a priori* possible, indeed, that the Jewish rite was borrowed from the Christians or that the Christian was based upon the Jewish, And we may judge the similarity too close to admit the likelihood of their being of wholly independent origin.⁴²

Warfield believed baptism did not replace circumcision until Acts fifteen where, *we see the change formally constituted at the so-called Council of Jerusalem—*

How fully Paul believed that baptism and circumcision were but two symbols of the same change of heart, and that one was instead of the other, may be gathered from Col. ii. 11, when, speaking to a Christian audience of the Church, he declares that “in Christ ye were also circumcised”—but how?—“with a circumcision not made with hands, in putting off the body of the flesh,”—that is, in the circumcision of Christ. But what was the Christ-ordained circumcision? The Apostle continues: “Having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised

³⁸ Ibid., Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 18, 19. Also see Ibid., *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 41, pp. 336, 337. Not only does he equate rebaptizers with the papacy in the preface to his commentary on Galatians, elsewhere Luther uses very crude caricatures and strong pejorative language as a logical argument against the Pope of Rome. The actual words used on these pages are far too vile to print in a Christian work, but the reader should look at them and draw his own conclusion. Although we must consider the times in which Luther lived, we should still remind ourselves that pejorative language and character assassination are never valid arguments.

³⁹ Luther was sure that they were in error. *Luther’s Works: Table Talk*, Theodore G. Tappert, editor/translator; Helmut T. Lehmann, general editor (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), Vol. 54, p.152.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 18, 19.

⁴¹ *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, J.I. Packer, Editors (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1988), pp. 716-718. “Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921), was the last great theologian of the conservative Presbyterians at Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey... Warfield distinguished himself as a scholarly defender of Augustinian Calvinism.”

⁴² Benjamin Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin Warfield: Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1932), Vol. IX, p. 380, cf. 377-380.

Him from the dead.” Hence in baptism they were buried with Christ, and this burial with Christ was the circumcision which Christ ordained, in the partaking of which they became the true circumcision. This falls little, if any, short of a direct assertion that the Christian Church is Israel, and has Israel’s circumcision, though now in the form of baptism.⁴³

Warfield goes to great lengths in an attempt to refute the *Systematic Theology* of Dr. Augustus H. Strong—the formidable advocate of believer’s baptism.⁴⁴ He argues that Strong’s position is based on, *the illegitimate use it makes of the occasional character of the New Testament declarations.*⁴⁵ And it is Strong’s, *unmeasured zeal to make all texts which have been appealed to by paedobaptists—not merely fail to teach paedobaptism—but teach that children were not baptized, that has led him so far astray here.* He discards all of Strong’s arguments as based on an unscholarly *foregone conclusion.* Warfield illustrates his rebuttal of Strong as follows:

I am prepared to allow in general the validity of Dr. Strong’s first argument—when thus softened to reasonable proportions. It is true that there is no express command to baptize infants in the New Testament, no express record of the baptism of infants, and no passages so stringently implying it that we must infer from them that infants were baptized. If such a warrant as this were necessary to justify the usage we should have to leave it incompletely justified. But the lack of this express warrant is something far short of forbidding the rite; and if the continuity of the Church through all ages can be made good, the warrant for infant baptism is not to be sought in the New Testament but in the Old Testament...⁴⁶

Warfield’s final rebuttal is: *But Strong has omitted to give the chapter and verse where Christ’s command not to baptize infants is to be found.* He then concludes by saying: *The argument in a nutshell is simply this: God established His Church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until He puts them out. He has nowhere put them out.*⁴⁷

But the Old and New Testaments reveal that physical circumcision did not accomplish spiritual circumcision. It is easy to see that many circumcised Jews of Christ’s day were not only uncircumcised of heart but out (not put out) of spiritual Israel. They were out because they were never in, as Jesus said: *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

The nation of Israel was a visible, corporate entity. The belief that the Church of Jesus Christ is Israel has led to the belief that the universal Body of Christ should be a visible, organized entity with a headquarters staffed by men on earth. Many reformers were strong believers in the state church concept of dominion theology, or *theonomy* as it is sometimes called. It is believed that the Old Testament prophecies of the restoration of Israel were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost rather than in some future millennium. We

⁴³ Ibid., *Works of B. Warfield*, Vol. IX, p.405.

⁴⁴ For an excellent study of *believer’s baptism* see Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1969), Three Volumes in One, pp. 931-959.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Works of B. Warfield*, Vol. IX, p. 393.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *Works of B. Warfield*, Vol. IX, p. 399.

⁴⁷ Ibid., *Works of B. Warfield*, Vol. IX, p. 408.

believe that Christ clearly addressed this question just prior to the Day of Pentecost. The disciples asked the Lord: *Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel* (Acts 1:6)? Jesus forthrightly tells them that it is none of their business to know when that will happen: *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power* (vs. 7). However, there is something that is your business to know: *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth* (vs. 8). Now, it cannot be the disciples' business to know this and, at the same time, none of their business to know when the kingdom will be restored to Israel, if they indeed are both the same thing. Therefore, the Day of Pentecost was not the restoration of the earthly kingdom of Israel.

Jesus considered corporate Israel (i.e. *the commonwealth of Israel*) to be the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matt. 10:6). Even in their lost state, God gave the Scriptures; made covenants and promises; and gave us Christ through them (Rom. 9:1-5). But a Jew is not saved by being in the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:12, 17), nor is an Old Testament Gentile unsaved by being outside the commonwealth of Israel (cf. discussion of Job and friends in chapter three). Both Jews and Gentiles equally need Christ as Savior and find Him in the Gospel (Eph. 2:18,19). Personal salvation makes anyone a member of the *household of God*, but fleshly birth and circumcision makes one a member of the *commonwealth of Israel*. It is not the *commonwealth*, but *household of God...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* (Eph. 2:19, 20) that a Christian becomes a part of at conversion (Gal. 6:16)—*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh* (Phil. 3:3). We were afar off from Christ and made nigh to Christ by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). But so also were many in the commonwealth of Israel (Rom. 9:1-5). It is only in Christ that the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles has been removed (Eph. 2:14; Gal. 3:28). A believer does not become one new man with a lost citizen of political Israel, but becomes one in Christ with a saved Jew in a new entity called the *Household of God*, comprised only of saved people.

Before proceeding we should note that numerous Baptists are currently embracing the *baptismal salvationist* view, whereas many Reformed theologians never adopted such a view. The *New Dictionary of Theology*, with J. I. Packer as consulting editor, says of Baptists:

Suspicious of sacramentalism, most Baptists have until comparatively recently interpreted believer's baptism primarily in symbolic terms and as an individual act of personal witness. However, the past two decades have witnessed in many places an increasing desire to regard baptism as integral to the gospel (so that it becomes part of their proclamation of Christ), conversion (regarding it as the outward ratification of an inward turning to God) and church membership (so that baptism is viewed not solely in personal terms as "into Christ" but also corporately as into his body, the church).⁴⁸

If one would walk into the theology departments of many Baptist seminaries and colleges today and ask if it is appropriate to believe that baptism regenerates, or at least imparts the saving grace of God as the primary means of saving grace, they would hear

⁴⁸ Ibid., *New Dictionary of Theology*, P. 75.

that this is just a semantically different way of expressing the same gospel that Baptists have always preached.

However, traditional Baptists would be pleased to find that there were Reformed theologians who never believed that baptism regenerates the sinner or imparts the saving grace of Christ.⁴⁹ Charles Hodge describes Zwingli thusly:⁵⁰

According to the doctrine of Zwingli afterwards adopted by the Remonstrants, the sacraments are not properly “means of grace.” They were not ordained to signify, seal, and apply to believers the benefits of Christ’s redemption. They were indeed intended to be significant emblems of the great truths of the Gospel. Baptism was intended to teach the necessity of the soul’s being cleansed from guilt by the blood of Christ and purified from the pollution of sin by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. They were further designed to be perpetual memorials of the work of redemption, and especially to be the means by which men should, in the sight of the Church and of the world, profess themselves to be Christians...The sacraments, therefore, are “badges of Christian men’s profession.”⁵¹

Although Baptist theology would differ with Hodge regarding the mode of baptism and the proper candidates for baptism,⁵² they would rejoice in his distinction between ritual and reality when he writes:

Circumcision did not make a man a Jew. It gave him neither the knowledge nor the grace necessary to his being one of the true children of Israel. It was the appointed means of avowing that he was a Jew; it was the sign of his being included among the worshippers of the true

⁴⁹ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life (Fragment): Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life (Church Dogmatics)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), Vol. IV, 4, pp. 128, 129... Barth describes Huldrych Zwingli thusly: “Zwingli’s understanding and doctrine of baptism are worked out in the *Commentarius*, the book *Vom touf...*, the reply to the *Toufbuchlein* of Balthasar Hubmaier, the *Elenchus in catabaptistarum strophas* (all 1525), and the *Quaestiones de Sacramento Baptismi* aimed at Schwenkfeld (1530). His teaching departs from the tradition which we have considered in its Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinistic forms. It does so first in a way which brings it close to that represented in the present work, for Zwingli very definitely dissociates himself from the sacramental view of baptism, which he also, not unjustly, thought he could detect among his Anabaptist adversaries. Among his contemporaries he was a lonely figure... In Zwingli everything finally stands or falls with the principle, which is more philosophical than theological, that an external thing cannot do an internal work, that a material thing cannot accomplish or reveal what is spiritual... According to Zwingli, the founder of baptism was not Jesus Christ—He simply confirmed it in Mt. 28:19—but John the Baptist (Germ. 366, 424).”

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *New Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 312, 313. “Hodge, Charles (1797-1878) was the best-known proponent of the conservative Calvinistic theology that came from the Presbyterian seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, from its founding in 1812 to its reorganization in 1929...but his work remains the most effective 19th century American presentation of Calvinism.”

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), Vol. III, p. 498.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 537... “It is not denied that *Baptizo* means to immerse, or that it is frequently so used by the fathers as by the classic authors; it is not denied that the Christian rite was often administered, after the apostolic age, by immersion; it is not even denied that during certain periods of the history of the Church, and in certain regions, immersion was the common method in which baptism was administered. But it is denied that immersion is essential to baptism; that it was the common method in the apostolic Churches; that it was at any time or in any part of the Church the exclusive method; and more especially it is denied that immersion is now and everywhere obligatory or necessary to the integrity of Christian baptism.”

God; and it secured for him the privileges of the theocracy. In like manner, baptism does not make a man a Christian. It is the appointed means of avowing that he is a Christian; it is the badge of his Christian profession before men, it secures for him the privileges of membership in the visible Church, and it is a pledge on the part of God that, if sincere and faithful, he shall partake of all the benefits of the redemption of Christ. It is only in this sense that the Reformed Church teaches the necessity of baptism. It has the necessity of a divine precept. It is the condition of salvation, in the same sense in which confession is, and in which circumcision was. The uncircumcised child was cut off from among the people, he forfeited his birthright. But he did not forfeit his salvation. The Apostle teaches us that if an uncircumcised man kept the law, his uncircumcision was counted for circumcision. To this the Jews objected by asking, What profit then is there in circumcision? Paul answered, Much every way. It is not useless, because not essential. The same is true of baptism. Although not the means of salvation or necessary to its attainment, its benefits are great and manifold.^{53 & 54}

One contemporary and popular view of the gospel is that salvation is purely by grace, but that the sovereign grace of God will irresistibly cause an elect one to obey all the commandments and sacraments of Christ.⁵⁵ Hodge responds to this view forthrightly when he writes:

For any one, therefore, to say that although a man truly believes the record God has given of his Son, yet that he is not a Christian, unless he belongs to some particular church organization, unless he is baptized with water, unless he comes to the Lord's table, contradicts not the general teaching of the Bible only, but the fundamental principle of the gospel method of salvation. Even Gabriel would not

⁵³ Ibid., Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 585. Also, p. 583: "The Jewish Church in the time of Christ, had become completely ritualistic. Rites and ceremonies had usurped the place of truth and holy living... The Reformation was in its essential character a protest against ritualism. It proclaimed salvation by a living faith which purified the heart, in opposition to the doctrine of salvation by rites and ceremonies... Ritualism is a broad, smooth, and easy road to heaven, and is always crowded."

⁵⁴ Ibid., *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, 4, p. 129...According to Barth, Zwingli affirms this same position: "According to Zwingli himself all teachers from the days of the apostles had greatly erred. Through a misunderstanding of John. 3:5 they had sought to ascribe to the water something which it cannot have. Christ has taken from us all external justifying (ed. Schuler and Schulthess, Germ. III, 238). Water baptism, in spite of the opinion of the earliest fathers, does not cleanse or save a man (255f.). He can be saved without baptism (241f.). It has no *vis mutandi* (Lat. III, 229). Nor does it serve—the core of Calvin's teaching is here rejected in advance—to give assurance or confirmation to faith (Germ. 243, Lat. 229f.). Only the direct work of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit can do these things. This alone is the basis of faith in the elect."

⁵⁵ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 33. "Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As a part of His saving work, God will produce repentance, faith, sanctification, yieldedness, obedience, and ultimately glorification. Since He is not dependent on human effort in producing those elements, an experience that lacks any of them cannot be the saving work of God."

Also, John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1993), p. 106. "Nowhere in Scripture do we find positional righteousness set against righteous behavior, as if the two realities were innately disconnected."

dare to shut the gates of paradise on the thief converted on the cross, because he had not been baptized.⁵⁶

However, not all Reformed theologians would agree with Hodge. Michael S. Horton is the founder and president of Christians United for Reformation (CURE). He reiterated a popular view regarding why many are missing the experience of God's forgiveness when he wrote:

Sealed with the Holy Spirit through baptism, faith, and the Word, we are forgiven people...

...the Lord's Supper is a sacrament. That is, it is a sign and seal through which He gives us what He promises us in the Gospel... This is not a Roman Catholic notion; it is the traditional evangelical view much lost to us today.

One of the reasons people seem to experience so little "forgiveness" today is because of the diet of the preaching and the lack of confirmation through the sacraments. In fact, many evangelical churches have abandoned the use of sacraments altogether, which of course means that they no longer fit the evangelical definition.⁵⁷

Horton speaks of the sign and the real thing as being interchangeable and often indistinguishable:

In every sacrament, two things are involved: the sign and the thing signified. The sign in baptism, for instance, is water; in the Lord's Supper, bread and wine. The thing signified in baptism is regeneration; in the Lord's Supper it is the body and blood of Christ. As the *Westminster Confession* puts it, "There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other."

In other words, the union between water and regeneration is so close in baptism that Scripture will often speak of both interchangeably, as if the water cleansed in baptism or as if the bread and wine in Communion were truly the body and blood of Christ.⁵⁸

If Horton's position is correct, then it could be said that the Anabaptist view (that the efficacy of Christ's saving grace must be evident before the ordinances) is an undermining of the saving grace of Christ—

⁵⁶ Ibid., Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 601.

⁵⁷ Michael S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars: Is America a Mission Field or Battlefield?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 219. In support of his view, Horton quotes *The Scots Confession* of 1560 which declares: "And so we utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacraments to be nothing else than naked and bare signs. No, we assuredly believe that by baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted, and also that in the supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us that he becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls." Again, Horton reminds us that *The Heidelberg Catechism* agrees with these definitions and quotes the *Westminster Confession*... "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace" Michael Horton, *In The Face Of God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), pp. 139, 140.

⁵⁸ Ibid. *In The Face Of God*, P. 140. See also p. 141: "It was for this reason that the Protestant Reformers followed such great church fathers as St. Augustine in calling the sacraments 'God's visible word.' The sacraments serve the same purpose as the Word itself, not only offering or exhibiting God's promise, but actually conferring his saving grace by linking us, through faith, to Christ and his benefits."

The Roman Church undermined the importance of God's ordained sacraments by adding sacraments of their own. The Anabaptist enthusiasts undermined them by reducing the efficacy of the two sacraments Christ instituted. We see both extremes in our own day as well.⁵⁹

Horton holds the same sacramental view regarding Old Testament circumcision of the flesh when he writes: *Did this mean that circumcision was an invalid sacrament? Hardly, After all, it was through this sign and seal of God's covenant of grace that the believing Israelites were incorporated into one redeemed people.*⁶⁰

Those who hold to a pure gospel of grace often have a friendly disagreement regarding the source of salvation faith. Both views hold that, apart from God's grace, no man could draw his first breath. One view holds that faith is possible because of God's common grace upon all humanity. The other view holds that faith can only exist as a fruit of being already regenerated and saved. Both views hold that faith alone in Christ alone must be present in order to experience salvation independently of baptism. Hodge punctuates his view in a way that should attract the attention and respect of anyone committed to a pure-grace view of the gospel of Christ:

It is plain that Baptism cannot be the ordinary means of regeneration, or the channel of conveying in the first instance the benefits of redemption to the souls of men, because, in the case of adults, faith and repentance are the conditions of baptism. But faith and repentance, according to the Scriptures, are the fruits of regeneration. He who exercises repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is in a state of salvation before baptism and therefore in a state of regeneration. Regeneration consequently precedes baptism, and cannot be its effect, according to the ordinance of God. That the Apostles did require the profession of faith and repentance before baptism, cannot be denied. This is plain, not only from their recorded practice but also from the nature of the ordinance. Baptism is a profession of faith in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; not of a faith to be obtained through the ordinance, but of a faith already entertained.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., Horton, *In The Face Of God*, p. 142. Horton oversteps the boundaries of logic when he says that God does not, yet does work outside His ordained means of saving grace (Word and Sacraments). See also pp. 219, 220, "In the face of super-spirituality, it is always necessary to stress God's objective, ordained and formal means of bringing us into fellowship with Himself. Nevertheless, even the biblical sacraments cannot be viewed magically, as if God were *bound* to means. **It is true that he does not work outside these means, but it is equally true that he does not have to work through them**" [emphasis added].

⁶⁰ Ibid., Horton, *In The Face Of God*, p. 220. Also Ibid., p. 220—"Furthermore, a sacrament not only reveals; it confers. Through Word and sacrament, God actually gives that which he promises in his gospel—forgiveness of sins, freedom from the tyranny of sin, and eternal life. The sacraments not only testify to or signify divine activity in salvation, but are part of that divine redemptive activity...A sacrament is a means of saving rather than common grace. Just as there can be no salvation apart from a miraculous new birth (John 3:3), so there can be no impartation of the new birth apart from the Spirit working through ordained means (Titus 3:5)...a sacrament...proclaims and seals divine forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, justification, and sanctification. Nothing other than the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are given this place by God as a means of grace."

⁶¹ Ibid. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 601.

What confuses many common Christian readers is the ambivalence of some scholars when questioned about the ability of sacraments to regenerate and save the soul of the sinner. The answer is often *yes*, and *no*, and *maybe*, and *actually either way*.

To be *saved* is to become a born again member of God's family. J. I. Packer writes:

Since Pentecost, becoming a member of God's family according to his revealed will—Christian initiation, to use the technical phrase—has involved three factors: repentance and faith, plus Christian baptism, plus the coming of the Spirit for new covenant ministry...The order scarcely matters; what matters is that all three links between us and Jesus Christ—faith, baptism, Spirit—should actually be there.⁶²

Packer's definition of *initiation* is given more explicitly when he writes:

Baptism is and always was the church's initiation-rite ("Initiation," from a Latin word for "beginning," means reception and entrance into committed membership).⁶³

Accordingly, in Packer's view, the baptism of the Spirit into the mystical body of Christ and ritual water baptism are one single act of Christ—

When Paul says that in the one *Spirit* we were all *baptized* (that is, by Christ) into his one *body* (I Corinthians 12:13), he thinks of water-baptism and the gift of the Spirit as two complementary aspects of a single act of Christ, who claims and incorporates or ingrafts us (Paul's image, Romans 11:17-24) into vital union with himself...In God's revealed purpose for our lives, water-baptism and Spirit-baptism are joined. Let not any of us in thought or practice put them asunder.⁶⁴

Putting the two asunder is precisely what Packer thinks the *believer's baptism* doctrine does:

To safeguard the importance of conversion, some proponents of infant baptism argued that the regeneration which baptism in some sense mediates is a different thing from the regeneration into which the converted man has come; and some Baptists affirmed that true water-baptism (as opposed to the Spirit baptism of conversion) is the believer's witness to his response to grace, rather than a sign or means of God's work of grace itself. Thus people have put asunder what God had joined.⁶⁵

⁶² J. I. Packer, *I Want to Be a Christian* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977), p. 138.

⁶³ J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), p. 95. Published originally under the above title *I Want to Be a Christian*. See P. 100: "Paul writes to First-generation converts whose baptism, according to New Testament custom, would have followed directly on their professing faith; so that believing and being baptized were already linked in their minds as two aspects of the single reality of becoming a Christian."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Packer, *I Want To Be A Christian*, pp. 138, 139. See *Ibid.* *Growing in Christ*, p. 136: "In the New Testament baptism signifies all aspects of entering new life in Christ, including the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 12:13)."

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Packer, *Growing in Christ*, p.p. 93, 94.

The *believer's baptism* doctrine sees ritual baptism as the profession of faith of one already regenerated and born again. Thus, the rite is a sign or token of something that is already real. This is quite different from Packer, who writes:

The sacraments are rightly viewed as means of grace...Knowing this, Christ and the apostles not only speak of the sign as if it were the thing signified but speak too as if receiving the former is the same as receiving the latter...As the preaching of the Word makes the gospel audible, so the sacraments make it visible, and God stirs up faith by both means...Sacraments function as means of grace on the principle that, literally, seeing is (i.e., leads to) believing.⁶⁶

However, after proclaiming that the doctrine of *believer's baptism* puts asunder what God has joined together, Packer can affirm that the “Baptist” way can bring a sinner into union with Christ prior to, or even without, ritual baptism—⁶⁷

...no Christian tradition—Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox—allows that baptized persons capable of faith can be saved without faith, or that genuine believers can be lost for being unbaptized.⁶⁸ ...When are we thus washed? When we believe—that is, commit ourselves to Christ...⁶⁹

Accordingly, as can be seen, we can get the answer *yes, no, maybe* or *either way* when asking for a direct response regarding the efficacy of ritual baptism in personal salvation.

Regarding the position that the Church is Israel and that, therefore, baptism replaced circumcision, we will let nineteenth century pastor/theologian, Alexander Carson [1776-1884] give us the *believer's baptism* response. In his lengthy work on the baptism debate he could find, *no plausible foundation in the word of God* for baptism replacing circumcision.⁷⁰ The advocates of baptismal regeneration placed the burden of proof on their opponents, challenging them to find a verse that commands not to baptize infants into the mystical body of Christ. However, Carson properly placed the burden of proof on them, in that their position was so generally received and taken for granted as a first principle. Look again at the problem passage:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11, 12).

Carson is correct when he says: *This passage says not a word about the subject, either expressly or by implication. They represent the apostle as saying, 'being buried with*

⁶⁶ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), pp. 210, 211.

⁶⁷ Usually, if an advocate of *believer's baptism* is leading one to Christ on his deathbed, he will bring him to faith in the finished work of Christ but not baptize him. He will assure him of salvation the same as the thief on the cross.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Packer, *Growing in Christ*, p. 100.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷⁰ Alexander Carson, *Baptism: Its Mode and Subjects* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications), p. 228.

*Christ by the washing of baptism, they are circumcised with the circumcision without hands.*⁷¹ But this is not how the passage is constructed.

Carson points out that the *apostle himself minutely explains how they were circumcised in Christ. It is a circumcision made without hands. It cannot then, be baptism; for it is not without hands...*

This circumcision consists in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh. The external circumcision cut off a part of the flesh; the circumcision without hands puts off the body of the sins of the flesh. This is the circumcision of Christ; the other was the circumcision of the law...It is called the circumcision made without hands to distinguish it from its type, the circumcision of the flesh: it is called the circumcision in which is put off the body of the sins of the flesh, to distinguish it from the typical circumcision, which did not cut off sin, but flesh: it is called the circumcision of Christ, to distinguish it from the circumcision of Moses. No language can be more express, or less capable of perversion. The circumcision here spoken of, could not possibly be baptism; because it is a circumcision which Christians are not only said to have without any external operation, but which they have in Christ: "*In whom ye are circumcised.*" Christ himself performs this circumcision, and we have it in him.⁷²

Yes, something did replace circumcision. *The circumcision made without hands, came in the room of the circumcision made with hands; the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh came in the room of the cutting off the foreskin; the circumcision of Christ came in the room of the circumcision of Moses...The Christian ordinances do not come in the room of the Jewish ordinances.*⁷³ So, according to Carson, Jewish typical ordinances were literally fulfilled in the Christ event, not in corresponding ordinances, such as baptism and communion. Carson illustrates this precise point, using the Lord's Supper as an example:

The Lord's supper and the passover have a resemblance still more close; yet the one is not said to come in the room of the other. Christ himself has come in the room of the passover; for it is said, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." The Lord's supper is a feast of like nature, but with this fundamental difference, which equally applies to baptism and circumcision—it does not belong to the same persons. The Lord's supper, as well as baptism, belongs solely to the true Israel of God: the passover belonged to the carnal Israel, without respect to their faith or character. The persons whom John drove from his baptism, had as good a right to all the Jewish ordinances as John the Baptist himself. The Scribes, and Pharisees, and Sadducees, with the whole unbelieving body of the Jewish nation, enjoyed all the ordinances of the Jewish dispensation, by as valid a title as the apostles of Christ. Neither Jesus nor his apostles ever forbade this, nor made any observations on it as an impropriety. The ministrations of the priests were never objected to; because they were carnal men, and rejected the Messiah when he manifested himself to Israel. This is the grand distinction between Jewish ordinances and the ordinances of the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 229.

⁷³ Ibid.

Church of Christ. The former shadowed good things to come, and were appointed for the nation in general, which had only a typical holiness; the latter are appointed only for the true holy people, and take it for granted, that all who partake of them, enjoy the thing figured by them.⁷⁴

Carson continues by arguing that if baptism replaced circumcision, it would not have commenced until the former had ceased, and it would not have applied to circumcised persons. He then asks: *Why did John baptize the circumcised Jews before the manifestation of Christ? Why did Jesus baptize before the end of the Jewish dispensation?*⁷⁵ Carson places the burden of proof on his opponents and points out that their highest authority is *the saying of the divines*.⁷⁶

It has been argued that only the children of believers have the right to baptism based on the faith of the immediate ancestor. But Carson argues that *the child of a Jew must be circumcised without any respect to the faith of the parent. If, then, none but believers have a right to obtain baptism for their children, the law of circumcision does not apply to it.* He also questions why slaves are not required to be baptized with their masters as the law of circumcision requires (Gen. 17:10-13), and, if the baptized will obtain an earthly Canaan.⁷⁷

Carson wonders why, being excluded from circumcision, females had equal spiritual privileges with males. There was no spiritual distinction between male and female. He called circumcision *a part of that yoke, from which the spiritual Israelites were delivered by Christ*.⁷⁸ It is strange for Him to hear Christians speaking of fleshly circumcision as a ritual privilege. Regarding two separate OT gospels, he states:

Had circumcision, then, been appointed to designate the heirs of the everlasting inheritance, it must have been extended to females. It is said, the Abrahamic covenant contained spiritual blessings: infants had its seal; why, then, shall not infants have baptism? I reply, the one half of Jewish infants had not the seal, which demonstrates that the seal had no personal application to the individual.⁷⁹

A casual reading of the New Testament will convince anyone that fleshly circumcision never bestowed eternal salvation on a Jewish person. Otherwise Paul was wasting his time longing for their salvation. But if baptism is circumcision under a different form, why is it considered to bestow eternal salvation? Carson asks:

But are we for this reason to infer, that as infants under the Jewish dispensation received circumcision, a rite that supposed no character in the person circumcised, they should under the Christian dispensation

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 229, 230.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 230. Actually, Jesus authorized his disciples to baptize.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 231. He noted a unique contrast when he said: “The church of Israel had the circumcision of the flesh,—the church of the New Testament has the circumcision of the heart.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., Carson is speaking of personal, spiritual application.

receive baptism, which supposes that all baptized persons are washed from sin through the belief of the truth.⁸⁰

Jews in New Testament times could not unite with a church without a profession of faith in Christ as the Messiah/Savior. John the Baptist would not baptize a Jew until he believed in Jesus. This causes Carson to ask the question:

Is the Christian church that rejected the great body of the Jewish nation, the same with the Jewish church, which, by God's own appointment, contained the whole nation? Was the church into which its members were born, the same with the church whose members must be born from above.—born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God? Was the church that admitted every stranger to its passover, without any condition of faith or character, merely on complying with a certain regulation that gave circumcision to their males, without any condition of faith or character, the same with the church that requires faith and true holiness in all who enjoy its ordinances? Was the church that contained the scribes, and Pharisees, and Sadducees—the most cruel, determined, open, and malignant enemies of Christ—the same with that church into which such persons could not enter without a spiritual birth? The church of Israel was the nation of Israel, and as a whole could no more be called the church of Christ, in the sense of that phrase in the New Testament, than the nation of England can be called the church of Christ. It is said that a similar corruption has taken place in the church of Christ. But this observation proceeds on a fundamental mistake. The very constitution of the Jewish church recognized the membership of carnal persons. It did not make the distinction between those born after the flesh, and those born after the Spirit. There was no law to exclude the Pharisees, or even the Sadducees, from the Jewish church. Their doctrines and practices were condemned by the Old Testament; but it was no corruption of the constitution of the church to contain them. On the other hand, the constitution of the churches of Christ rejects such persons, and provides for their expulsion.⁸¹

Carson makes strong note of the fact that the ordinances of the Jewish church were abolished in Christ Himself Who could not have been a priest in it. But He is the only mediator between God and man in the Christian church, *For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law*" (Heb. 7:12). The Jewish church, by its constitution, included carnal members; the Christian Church, by its constitution, admits spiritual members.⁸²

Carson continues by noting that the theory which affirms *that baptism and the Lord's supper are seals of the covenant, is a doctrine so common, and a phraseology so established, that it is received without question as a first principle*. Without being too disrespectful of the ancients he said: *Let our ancestors have all the esteem and gratitude to which they are entitled—but that esteem is much misplaced, if it leads us to follow them in anything in which they have not followed Christ*. Therefore, he questions again:

Is there any Jewish tradition more void of scriptural authority, than that which designates baptism and the Lord's supper *seals of the new*

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 233.

⁸² Ibid., p. 234.

covenant? There is not in the New Testament any single portion that can bear such a meaning...God...has not said that baptism is a seal. Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of the faith of Abraham. This was God's seal to the truth, till the letter was abolished. The Spirit of truth is the seal, and the circumcision of the heart by him is the thing signified by circumcision in the flesh. The circumcised nation was typical of the church of Christ, for the apostle says, "we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit;" and "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." The circumcision of the Jews was the letter, of which the circumcision of the heart in Christians is the spirit. The Christian, then, has a more exalted seal than circumcision—he has the Spirit of God, "whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption." Ephes. iv. 30. When sinners believe in Christ, they are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is "the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Eph. i.13. The seal, then, that comes in the room of circumcision, is the seal of the Spirit. Circumcision sealed God's truth to Abraham, and all who ever shall have the faith of Abraham. It was applied to the typical nation without respect to character; but the seal of the Spirit is applied to none but believers, and to believers of all nations as well as Jews. When the Holy Spirit himself, in the heart of the believer, is the seal of God's truth, there is no need of any other seal...He that is once sealed by the Spirit, is secured to eternity.⁸³

How can Carson be right and almost two thousand years of tradition be wrong? Sometimes error has a long history. Paul told the Ephesians that error would begin immediately after his departure. Carson reminds us, *How soon was the Lord's supper corrupted by the church at Corinth*. We saw from chapter one of this present work how strong and quick *they of the circumcision* were in the apostolic period to dominate with error every environment they entered. If baptism is simply circumcision in another form, then every argument of *they of the circumcision* can be equally argued in favor of baptismal regeneration.

Is there a single window through which we could look for an understanding concerning the Apostle Paul's meaning when he pinned the words: *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead?* The answer is explicitly "yes"—it would be the window of Paul's personal conversion to Christ. When was he regenerated, born again, illuminated and justified in God's saving grace? When can it first be said that he was *in* or *with* Christ? Was Paul already with Christ as he was being baptized or was he baptized to get "with Christ"?

Many scholars date his new birth from his meeting with Ananias in Damascus—

And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:14-16).

⁸³ Ibid., p. 235

Two questions revolve around this passage—was Paul saved on the Damascus Road or at Judas' house?

Several factors suggest he was saved on the Damascus Road. First, the gospel was presented to him directly by Christ—*For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.* (Acts 11:15). The gospel that converted Paul came straight to him from Jesus Christ—*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ* (Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:1-4)—not later by Ananias.

Paul had already submitted in faith to Christ before he met Ananias—

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, **that they may receive forgiveness of sins**, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, **I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:** But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and *then* to the Gentiles, **that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.** For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill *me*. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles." (Acts 16:15-23). [emphasis added]

The Greek aorist participle, *epikalesamenos*, translated (*calling on His name*) refers either to action which is simultaneous with or before that of the main verb. Here Paul's calling on Christ's name (for salvation) preceded his water baptism. The participle may therefore be translated: *having called on His name*.

What then do the words (*wash your sins away*) mean? Do they teach that salvation comes by water baptism? Because Paul was already cleansed spiritually:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (Acts 26:16-18).

In order to be a light of the Gospel to the Gentiles, one must, first of all, be a recipient of the light of the Gospel, as the Apostle Paul was prior to his baptism—

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed

bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, **that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth**. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region (Acts 13:44-49). [emphasis added]

What is the “Light” that brings forgiveness to men? Why not ask Paul himself, Simeon the priest and then John the evangelist—

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 4:3-6).

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8).

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness (I Thess. 5:5).

The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up (Matt. 4:16).

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel (Lk. 2:29-32).

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. *That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (Jn. 1:4-9).

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (Jn. 3:18-19).

Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than *that* of John: for the

works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me (Jn.. 5:33-36).

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (Jn. 9:5).

Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them... Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (Jn. 12:35, 36, 44-48).

Now the question is, *Did Paul distinguish the Gospel Light from baptism? Listen to him as he describes the baptisms of the Corinthians:*

I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:14-18).

But if Paul did not baptize them, how could he have begotten them in the Lord as he said:

I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me (I Cor. 4:14-16)?

So, is a person saved when he is begotten (*or born again*) or when he is baptized? Let the Apostle Peter give us the answer:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet. 1:3-5).

The Apostle John tells us that to be *born of God* is synonymous with being *begotten of God* when he says: *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him (I*

Jn. 5:1). The Bible teaches that God *begets* us when we receive the Word of Truth: *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures* (James 1:18). It is through the “Word of God” that we are born again (or begotten)—*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever* (I Pet. 1:23).

We can objectively see from where water is coming and to where it is flowing, but not so with spiritual birth—

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit (Jn. 3:6-8).

How could Paul have espoused the Corinthians to Christ if he did not baptize them?—

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (II Cor. 11:2, 3).

To espouse means to “join someone to.” It is the same concept as the word “betroth,” as in Hosea 2:19-20:

... And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

In New Testament times, engaged couples were so joined that a legal divorce had to transpire in order to undo an espousement, as in Matt. 1:18, 19:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.⁸⁴

Thus, even though the marriage of the Lamb will not take place until after the rapture of the Church, saints are forever Christ’s now because they are espoused, betrothed, begotten and born of God and joined to Him in eternal life, as Paul told the Corinthians: *But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit* (I Cor. 6:17); and as he said to the Romans:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together (Rom. 8:16,17).

What then do the words *wash away thy sins* mean in Acts 22:16? They refer to the symbolism of baptism. Why? Because baptism is a picture of God’s inner work of washing away sin. Paul’s conscience was clear the moment he believed, as the Apostle

⁸⁴ cf. Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:9.

Peter said: ...*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.* Paul's conscience was clear before he was baptized, and his baptism was his answer of a good conscience toward God.

Based upon Paul's use of the words *begotten, espoused, and joined* and his distinction between the *light* of the gospel and the ordinance of baptism, why not let him interpret his own words in Titus 3:5—... *Not by works of righteousness⁸⁵ which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.* Perhaps Paul would ask us by what authority the church divines have substituted "ritual baptism" for "washing" in this verse when it is not there— especially in light of the fact that he received God's mercy before he was baptized (Acts 26:19); received the fullness of the Holy Spirit before he was baptized (Acts 9:17)⁸⁶; was washed by the gospel in the Word of God before he was baptized (9:6; Eph. 5:26); was a chosen vessel before baptism (Acts 9:6); confessed Christ as Lord before baptism (9:6); called to preach the gospel before baptism (Acts 26:15-18); obeyed the Lord before baptism (Acts 9:6-9; 26:19); had a praying relationship with God before baptism (Acts 9:11); was ordained to suffer for Christ's sake before baptism (Acts 9:16); and was Ananias' brother in Christ before baptism (Acts 9:17).⁸⁷

Paul sees no difference between the putting away of sin, the washing away of sin or the washing of regeneration. But how are sins put away?

(Heb. 9:26) for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

This is experienced as a reality in the life of the believer at the moment of faith through the proclamation of the word of the gospel (Eph. 5:26).

In Mark 16:16 we see that belief and baptism are two separate acts: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* Most of the clear presentations of the gospel in the Bible do not even mention ritual baptism. But the New Testament does teach that a person is in union with Christ the moment he trusts Christ as his savior (John 1:12; 3:18; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 20:30; Acts 10:43-49, compare Acts 11:15-18).

It is totally legitimate to separate "belief" from "baptism," without minimizing either, and still call it the saving gospel. In Mark 16:16 there is no question but that "belief" and "baptism" are listed separately and are not synonymous. But notice what "believers" are in the New Testament. They are *sons of God* (Jn. 1:12, 13); have *eternal life* (Jn. 3:14-16, 18; 5:24; 6:47; I Jn. 5:13); have *passed from death unto life* (Jn. 5:24);

⁸⁵ Obeying the Law of Moses is a work of righteousness and circumcision was such a work. If baptism replaced circumcision, then baptism is a work of righteousness.

⁸⁶ Paul had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit but he was not yet filled with the Spirit. Paul often told saved Christians how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Compare Acts 10:43-47. The filling of the Holy Spirit is distinct from the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The filling can be observed before Pentecost (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Lk. 1:15, 41, 67; 4:1). In the N.T., everyone who had the baptism of the Spirit could be filled by the spirit if he met the conditions (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52; Eph. 5:18).

⁸⁷ Controversy exists regarding whether the reference to Paul as *brother* is a cultural greeting as a fellow Jew or a recognition as a brother in Christ. The N. T. uses the term either way throughout. Knowing what Paul had the legal authority to do with Christians it seems doubtful that the greeting meant *brother Jew*.

are *alive in Christ* (Jn. 11:25); shall *never die* (Jn. 11:26); have *remission of sins* (Acts 10:43-47; 15:7-11; 13:39; Rom. 3:27, 28; 4:5-8); are *purified* (Acts 15:9); sin is not *imputed* to them (Rom. 4:8); have *peace with God* (Rom. 5:1); have the *righteousness of God* (Rom. 10:3, 4); are *sealed by the Holy Spirit* (Eph. 1:13); sealed *unto the day of redemption* (Eph. 1:13); are *born of God* (I Jn. 5:1); are *indwelt* by God (I Jn. 4:15); have *overcome the world* (I Jn. 5:5); and have *God working within* (Phil. 1:6); are *predestinated* (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:28-30). It is God's will for all believers to be ritually baptized, but it is their faith, independent of baptism, that receives Jesus Christ (John 1:12).

We will discuss, in chapter nine of this work, other verses that are used to teach baptismal regeneration. In this chapter we have studied the OT covenant of circumcision, and found that it was not to be the plan of salvation or a means of saving grace. We have traced the history of the Jewish belief in circumcisonal regeneration. We have traced, in church history, the belief that baptism is circumcision in another form. We have demonstrated this to be false. And we have demonstrated that the Apostle Paul was regenerated, born again, justified, and called to preach before he was ritually baptized.

If the reader has trusted baptism to save him or to bestow salvation upon him, he needs to ask: *was I really trusting Christ alone for salvation? Or, Was I thinking that my faith could receive the grace of Christ only because my baptism as an infant placed me eternally into the body of Christ?* In chapter six we will discuss the controversy of infant baptism vs. believer's baptism.