

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 Nine

Scriptural Arguments For Baptismal Regeneration Examined

It is a common argument that until one is in possession of all of the facts, he should not be dogmatic about his conclusions. But even a casual reading of Scripture reveals that God expects Christians to arrive at a limited number of unmistakable conclusions without being in possession of all of the facts. One unmistakable truth is that no finite person is in possession of all of the facts. When someone says, *Do not say that you know anything for certain until you certainly know everything*, we should ask in response, *From what vantage point were you standing when you concluded for certain that unmistakable conclusions are impossible?* We should then ask, *Are you certain that we cannot be certain?* When a proposition violates the same rule which it sets forth, it is contradictory and incoherent.

God, the Creator, has designed our minds with the capability of thinking in a linear fashion. The fact that the entire human race recognizes the same limited number of metaphysical moral boundaries constitutes logical evidence that there exists a God of righteousness and wrath—

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them (Rom. 1:18, 19; cf. 2:14, 15).

This evidence is so logically conclusive that it is said of the unregenerate that they *hold the truth in unrighteousness*. We will expand upon this concept in chapter ten.

Furthermore, the objective designs and purposes of physical things constitute conclusive evidence of a metaphysical Creator—

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened (Rom. 1:20, 21).

We have heard the comparison of the human anatomy to a watch found on a jungle trail. Though we cannot see the designer and creator of the watch, we may unmistakably conclude that he existed by the logical inescapability of the fact that the watch could not have designed and brought itself into existence. These are unmistakable conclusions at which we can arrive without knowing all of the facts of the universe. We are indeed guilty of limiting God by concluding that an infinite being can reveal nothing to a finite being without revealing everything. Paul said of the unregenerate that *they knew God* (Rom. 1:21). This is a limited knowledge that God bestows upon the natural mind enabling the finite person to logically deduce the existence, righteousness, and wrath of God, thus bringing conviction of sin and of the righteous judgment of the Creator:

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged (Jn. 16:8-10).

This is a description of a limited capacity for some conclusive information. It is toward this capacity that we are to target our presentation of the Gospel of Christ (c.f. Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17). However, we must not mistake this mental capacity as a saving virtue, for the Scriptures assure us that men possess absolutely no saving virtue of their own (Rom. 3:10, 23).

But man has the option of rejecting this God-given capacity and exalting his imagination in its place, concluding this decision to be the ultimate act of wisdom—*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools* (Rom. 1: 22).

Christians are to avoid this same temptation in their theological conclusions because God has given us the way to accomplish this and bring our thoughts into godly obedience—

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5).

Each Christian will choose whether to worship God with his imagination or in spirit and truth—

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23, 24).

God has also given us the tools for testing the logical coherence of our conclusions with the known facts. This will not reveal all truth, but it will serve as a fast track to the discovery of what is not true. If our conclusions are incoherent with our limited possession of known facts, then they may also be incoherent with all the facts of reality. When we interpret any text of Scripture, we must apply this principle of coherence. This we did in the case of Paul's baptism (Acts 22:16 cf. chapter five of this present work). The idea that baptism literally washed away Paul's sins was incoherent to his own proclamations of the Gospel. We saw an incoherence between Paul's gospel and the debate over the distinction between ritual and reality (cf. chapter one of this present work). We found the gospel of circumcision to be incoherent with the unified plan of salvation presented throughout every division of Scripture (cf. chapter three of this present work). We observed the particular incoherence of ritual salvation with the NT gospel as it was proclaimed by John the Baptist (cf. chapter four of this present work). The idea of ritual salvation was strongly incoherent with John the Evangelist's record of the gospel of Christ (cf. discussion of Jn. 3:5 in chapter eight of this present work).

With this same principle of coherence in mind, we now examine several of the proof texts used by baptismal regenerationists to affirm that ritual is essential to salvation and imparts the saving grace of Christ.

The argument that one cannot be saved prior to baptism is often taken from Mark 16:16—*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*. Before applying the principle of coherence, we must first look at what is most obvious about the passage. We can see from the conjunction *and* that belief and baptism are two separate items. We also know that a person is in union with Christ from the moment of belief—

(Jn. 1:12) But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name.

(3:18) 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.

(3:36) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

(5:24) Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

(6:47) Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

(20:31) But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

(Acts 10:43-47) To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

(13:39) And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

(16:31) And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Looking closely at Mk. 16:16, one can base his interpretation on what the passage says or upon what it does not say. It does not say *he that is baptized not shall be damned*, but it does say *he that believeth not shall be damned*. From this point we should seek coherence with the many passages which affirm that they who believe are *sons of God* (Jn. 1:12, 13); have *eternal life* (Jn. 3:14-16; 5:24; 6:47; I Jn. 5:13); are not *condemned* (Jn. 3:18); have *passed from death to life* (Jn. 5:24); are *alive in Christ* (Jn. 11:25); shall *never die* (Jn. 11:26); have *remission of sins* (Acts 10:43-47; 15:7-11); are *justified* (Acts 13:39); are *purified* (Acts 15:9); are *saved* (Acts 16:31); are *made righteous* (Rom. 3:24-28; 4:5-8; 10:3, 4); do not have sin *imputed* to them (Rom. 4:8); have *peace with God* (Rom. 5:1); are *sealed by the Holy Spirit* (Eph. 1:13) *unto the day of redemption* (Eph. 4:30); are *born of God* (I Jn. 5:1); are *indwelt* by God (I Jn. 4:15); have *overcome the world* (I Jn. 5:5); have God working within (Phil. 1:6, 7); and are predestinated (Eph. 1:5).

Is it legitimate to distinguish *belief* from *baptism* in the definition of salvation? In Mk. 16:16 there is no question that *belief* and *baptism* are listed separately. They are not synonymous. The following statement is true: *he that believeth and is baptized; has blue eyes; wears red ties; lives in a white house, etc., shall be saved. However, he that*

believeth not shall be damned. He that *believeth not* shall be damned solely on that basis. Thus, the principle of coherence with the Bible as a whole disqualifies Mk. 16:16 as teaching *baptismal regeneration*.

Before examining the other proof texts used to defend *baptismal regeneration*, we need to expand on our discussion of *order* which took place in chapter five. Some will argue that the order in which faith, ritual baptism, and Spirit baptism occurs is irrelevant, but that all three are essential to salvation. J. I Packer states:

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 (cf. Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9ff.; Ephesians 1:13ff.). In experience, the order has varied; apparently it was faith-baptism-Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42), Spirit-faith-baptism at the "Gentile Pentecost" (Acts 10:44-48), faith-Spirit-baptism at Galatia (Gal. 3:2); certainly, it has been baptism-faith-Spirit for all those Christians down the centuries who were baptized as infants. The order scarcely matters; What matters is that all three links between us and Jesus Christ—faith, baptism, Spirit—should actually be there.

When Paul says that in the one *Spirit* we were all *baptized* (that is by Christ) into his one *body* (I Cor. 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 engrafts us (Paul's image, Romans 11:17-24) into vital union with himself. So converts who have received the Spirit should seek baptism, and the baptized should seek conversion, so that they may receive the Spirit! 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.¹

When Packer states: *certainly, it has been baptism-faith-Spirit for all those Christians down the centuries who were baptized as infants*, he is basing his certainty on that which cannot be found in Scripture. Thus *experience* becomes *His revealed will*—(cf. chapter eight of this present work). The fact is that, though water baptism could occur before the baptism of the Spirit, scriptural water baptism never occurred prior to saving faith. The original disciples were of course ritually baptized prior to the coming of the Spirit. We will argue later that the Jews on the Day of Pentecost were born again believers prior to their water baptism. In Acts 10, 11, 15 the Gentile believers experienced faith, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and then water baptism (10:47, cf. the Galatians, Gal. 3:2, 3). We will argue that the Ephesians who were so-called "disciples of John the Baptist" were not really born again at all, but were introduced to Christ by Paul and subsequently rebaptized. Rebaptism was not required of anyone else in Scripture who was saved and baptized during the lives of John and Jesus.

But many seem to stumble at the order in Acts 8 when Philip evangelizes the Samaritans—faith, water baptism, Spirit baptism (Acts 8:15, 16). God is not totally explicit as to why He changed the order in this case. Without being overly dogmatic on this point, let us consider several observations and suggestions.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Growing In Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994), PP. 124, 125.

John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter, Philip the Evangelist and the Apostle Paul all preached the gospel of personal salvation through faith in Christ.² This is why Philip could preach Jesus Christ to the Ethiopian Eunuch from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah even though Isaiah never mentions ritual baptism. Remember the problem that Jews had with Samaritans—they were considered the “mixed-breeds” of the ten northern tribes of Israel who were forced to marry the Assyrians during their captivity. There was potential controversy with the Jews in accepting Samaritans as brothers in Christ. Perhaps

this is why the apostles (Peter and John) themselves needed to impart the gift of the Spirit to them. There was a longstanding predisposition for schism between Jews and Samaritans, and perhaps it was needful for the Samaritans to be officially introduced with full apostolic authority into the communion of fellowship with the Jerusalem saints.

Philip’s sermon would indeed have introduced a controversy in Jerusalem. He preached *the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus* (Acts. 8:12) to these Samaritans. When he preached Jesus as the Christ (literally, *the Messiah*), he was saying that the Samaritans would become heirs of the Millennium by faith in Jesus Christ, as Messiah. They were still Jews in God’s eyes. The Millennium will be shared by twelve tribes of Israel. During the seventieth week of Daniel there will be 12,000 Jews saved from each tribe of Israel, totaling 144,000. There probably needed to be explicit apostolic authority for the idea of an equivocation of Samaritans and Jews in the Jerusalem church. In Acts 6 the Palestinian Jewish converts desired to withhold the benevolent fund from Grecian Jewish converts. The Grecians were mostly Jews who had come home from the dispersion (the evangelist, Philip, was a Grecian Jew and was, therefore, open-minded enough to take the gospel to the Samaritans). How much less would Jewish converts be inclined to extend the hand of fellowship to Samaritans?

It is interesting to note that the Apostle John would be one of the apostles to impart the Spirit to the Samaritans. When Jesus had sent messengers to a Samaritan village to make ready for His visit there, the Samaritans were not receptive. So James and John said: *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?* (Luke 9:54). For this they received a sharp rebuke from Jesus, Who then informed them of His intention to save and not destroy them (Luke 9:55, 56).

So with Philip being a Grecian Jew and not an apostle, it is easy to see why apostolic authority needed to be injected into the situation. Notwithstanding, regardless of the variation of order in the NT baptism accounts, there is no account of an individual being biblically baptized prior to faith and salvation.

When the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus, he met a group of men calling themselves disciples of John the Baptist. Paul asked them, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* Actually, Paul was asking them if they had received the Spirit

² Many argue that it was John’s purpose to preach the Kingdom of God to Israel (Lk. 16:16) rather than the NT plan of salvation. The fact is that John preached the Kingdom of God (Matt. 3:1, 2) and personal salvation through faith in Christ (Jn. 1:29, 36; Acts 19:4; 10:37, 43); Jesus did the same (Matt. 4:17; Acts 1:3, 6-9); and Peter (Acts 3:16; 10:37); and the evangelist Philip (Acts 8:12); and the Apostle Paul (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The term *Kingdom of God* often spoke of a coming kingdom while personal salvation in Christ Jesus is here and now (Acts 1:3-8).

when they believed (Acts 19:2). Their answer was that they had not even heard that the Holy Spirit had been given.³ At this point Paul inquired about their baptism and they responded that they had experienced John's baptism. Paul may have become suspicious of their having been personally associated with John, for the Baptist spoke often of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11, 12; Mk. 1:7, 8; Lk. 3:16, 17; Jn. 1:32, 33). So Paul proclaimed to these men in Ephesus that John required belief in Jesus before he baptized anyone (19:4). Paul may have had a difficult time conceiving of any one being scripturally baptized and yet being so ignorant about the new birth. *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus* (19:5). This would be the first case of *anabaptism* recorded in Church history. Then in 19:6 Paul laid hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost.

It is strange that no one else recorded in the NT, who was immersed with John's baptism, was required to submit to a rebaptism. The Apostles themselves were not required to submit to a rebaptism. Then why was it required of these "so called" disciples of John at Ephesus? That John required faith in Jesus seemed to be news to them. Perhaps they were disciples of disciples of John. It is possible that they trusted Christ for the first time that day, and, therefore, became baptized in the name of Jesus. This rebaptism became their Christian baptism. If they were baptized prior to faith in Christ for salvation, their baptism was invalid. The order, as in the case of the Samaritans, placed the giving of the Holy Ghost after ritual baptism but, as always, faith in Christ and salvation preceded the ritual baptism.

So, in the cases of the apostles prior to Pentecost, the Samaritans, and the so-called disciples of John, the baptism of the Spirit happened after ritual baptism but not before faith in Christ. From Acts 10:47 onward the principle of Romans 8:9 must be understood—*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. We become His at the moment of faith, from which time Christ is in us—And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin but the Spirit is life because of righteousness* (Rom. 8:10).

The next major proof text for *baptismal regeneration* is found in the second chapter of Acts. It was the Day of Pentecost or *Feast of Weeks* (Lev. 23:15-22). It was a day when Jews of many languages met in Jerusalem for the holiday. Also, the Christian disciples were all gathered together in one place. These disciples were already regenerated, justified, and saved through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross.

Many books have been written to address questions surrounding Acts chapter 2. We will address the most important question of all: *Was the NT gospel of Jesus Christ preached that day, or was it a parenthetical gospel of some kind?* The answer to the first part of this question is *yes* and the answer to the second part is *no*. Peter did preach the same gospel as was preached by Paul and John the Baptist—

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4).

The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, *I say*, ye know, which

³ It is therefore extremely doubtful that they had heard the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given with power and 3000 were saved and baptized. Among the seventeen nationalities present that day were men from Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital (Acts 2:9).

was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached (Acts 10:36, 37).

John did not baptize anyone in order that they would repent, but only because they had already changed their minds about Christ (cf. chapter four of this present work regarding the NT nature of John's baptism).

Peter spoke of the OT prophecy of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (vss. 29-37). The promise of salvation and remission of sins was not just a Jewish gospel, but was for anyone called by the Lord—

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:39).

Later in the book of Acts when the angel of the Lord loosed Peter from prison, he was commanded to preach the same gospel again in the temple—

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life (Acts 5:19, 20).

The Gospel he preached was distinct from his exhortations to be baptized—

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30, 31).

When Peter preached to the Gentile house of Cornelius it was a gospel of faith alone in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43), distinct from baptism—

Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we (Acts 10:47)?

Just as he began his message, their minds changed, they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and were placed into the Body of Christ—

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:15, 16).

Then Peter testified that these Gentiles received the same gift of the Holy Spirit that the disciples and the Jews had received on the Day of Pentecost:

Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as *he did* unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God (Acts 11:17)?

That day the Jews of Jerusalem agreed with the Apostle Peter that Hebrews and Gentiles are granted eternal life on the same exact basis—

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life (Acts 11:18).

Later, the Apostle Paul would proclaim to the Jews that all (Jews and Gentiles) are saved by one and the same gospel:

Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38, 39).

Note how Paul worded his gospel in a way similar to that presented by John the Baptist:

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly calling: 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 (Acts 26:19, 20).

During the debate at the Council of Jerusalem Peter argued that if Jews were to be saved, it would have to be the same way the House of Cornelius received eternal life (i.e. distinct from baptism):

And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they (Acts 15:7-11).

This is the same Gospel that Paul would later preach to King Agrippa as he explained his mission from Jesus Christ:

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 26:18).

Thus Paul could proclaim that there are not various ethnic versions of the NT gospel, but only one plan of salvation for all nations and classes:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:28, 29).⁴

The result of Peter's gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost was the conversion of three thousand individual Jews. This was not a national conversion, but rather a new birth experienced only by individuals who received the word of the Gospel—

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41).

⁴ We will discuss Gal. 3:27 later in this chapter.

Notice that only believers were baptized and that they did not contact the Word in the water, but rather contacted the water only after having received the Word..

In arguing for *baptismal regeneration* much emphasis is placed on the order in which Peter listed his instructions to those who desired to be saved: (a) repent; (b) be baptized (c) receive remission of sins; and (d) receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). Is the order that Peter used here a prescription of the order in which full salvation will occur? It has been argued for centuries that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is (a) water baptism; (b) happens at water baptism or (c) happens only after water baptism.

We must approach this problem of the order in Acts 2:38 using the principle of coherence. By Peter's own testimony they were saved the same way the house of Cornelius was saved (Acts 15:7-9), which was unmistakably before and independent of ritual baptism (Acts 10:47). Thus, their salvation was prior to and distinct from their ritual baptism—

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:15, 16).

Baptismal regenerationists will often argue that Acts 10 was the other side of a transition in the gospel, and therefore a different set of terms for receiving eternal life. It is argued that the way of life for a Gentile was different than that of a Jew. It was regarding this very point of controversy that the Jerusalem council met to resolve in Acts 15. In applying the principle of coherence, we must look closely at a particular occurrence of salvation between Acts 2 and Acts 10.

It was the day after, or shortly thereafter, the Acts 2:38 occasion when this same Apostle Peter led the lame man at the temple gate into a born again experience without his being baptized. When the beggar asked alms, Peter said: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk* (Acts 3:6b). Peter not only presented healing, but also spoke eternal life to this man so that he was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ without yet experiencing ritual baptism:

And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all (Acts 3:16).

Peter then preached to the Jews gathered at the temple, telling them that they needed a dose of the same gospel:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19a)

It is fundamental to notice at this point that Peter's gospel to these Jews and his gospel to the Gentiles was the same gospel predicted by the OT prophets—

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, *that* every soul, which will not

hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days (Acts 3:20-24).

(Cf. Acts 10:43) To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Peter preached the same gospel and the same baptism that John the Baptist had preached to the Jews—

The word which *God* sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached (Acts 10: 36, 37).

Though the Jews were unique in many ways and had a package of separate promises that the Gentiles and the Church would not possess, the gospel of eternal life presented to Abraham was the same as that which was presented to Gentiles—

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed (Acts 3:25).

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).

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed (Gal.3:8).

If the reader will recall chapter three of this present work, he will note again that the plan of salvation through the ages was always distinct from ritual and always looked forward to the finished work of the suffering Messiah.

Returning our thoughts to Peter and Acts 3, his version of the gospel that day was not for Jews only, but for Jews first—

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities (Acts 3:26).

Looking again at Acts 2:38 we must interpret the clause, *be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*. The correct interpretation of these words will be largely determined by the meaning of the word *for* (Gr. *eis*) in this context. This little Greek preposition can mean *with reference to*, *because of*, *in relation to*, *concerning* or *unto*. Using the principle of coherence, we can narrow the meaning in this passage to either *in order to* or *because of*. In the case of *in order to*, we would have to conclude that ritual baptism is essential to receiving remission of sins. In *because of*, we would conclude that Peter is telling them to be ritually baptized because their sins are already remitted. It is the *because of* usage that coheres with all we know of the plan of salvation throughout the OT and throughout the remainder of the NT.

Is there any biblical precedent for using *eis* in this manner? First we will look at Matt. 3:11—

I indeed baptize you with water unto (eis) repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire.

John the Baptist did not baptize them in order that they would repent, but only because they had repented.

In Matt. 12:41 we need to note that the Ninevites did not repent in order that Jonah would preach, but because he had already preached—

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at (eis) the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.

In Lk. 5:13, 14 the leper was to go to a priest and make an offering, not in order to be cleansed, but, because he had been cleansed—

And he put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for (eis) thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

If we said, *John was beheaded for (eis) his faithfulness*, would we be saying that he was executed in order that he would be faithful? If we said, *The criminal was hanged for (eis) his crime*, would we be saying that he was hanged in order that he would commit crime? If we said, *The people laughed for (eis) joy*, would we be saying that the people laughed in order to obtain joy? The interpretation we derive from Acts 2:38 must be consistent and coherent with the context of the entirety of Scriptures, or we have interpreted incorrectly. Baptism is not the gospel, but instead is a picture and a testimonial of the gospel from one who has already received it—

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4).

Ordinances have never, and can never, accomplish a literal remission of sins—

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:10-14).

Notice what the writer of Hebrews says about the saving faith of OT saints:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:39, 40).

This *better thing* was not another ordinance; they had books of ordinances. The *better thing* was the literal *offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*. This is why we must look to Jesus as *the author and finisher of our faith* (Heb. 12:2a).

A key verse used in tandem with Acts 2:38 is Gal. 3:27—*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. This text is used to affirm that we put on the robe of Christ's righteousness at the moment of ritual baptism. Although it is true that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and put upon us, at the moment of salvation, we must remind ourselves again that Mk. 16:16 clearly distinguishes between *belief* and *baptism*. The moment of faith and the moment of ritual baptism are two separate occurrences—e.g. the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:47). The verses preceding Gal. 3:27 affirm that the moment of salvation is the moment of faith:

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:22-26).

The word *into* (*eis*) in vs. 27 can be interpreted to say *with reference to*, pointing retroactively to the work of Christ applied to the sinner at the moment of faith. Compare I Cor. 10:2—*And were all baptized unto (eis) Moses in the cloud and in the sea*. If *eis* means *put into Christ* in Gal. 3:27 then the Corinthian passage could mean *put into Moses* or *in order to obtain Moses*. However, if we interpret *eis* to mean *with reference to*, the passage becomes coherent with all else we know about the moment of salvation. Israel passed through the Red Sea *because of* the leadership of Moses, not *in order to* obtain his leadership.

The phrase *put on* has several good applications in the NT. Compare Rom. 13:14, which was written to Christians who had already experienced salvation at the moment of faith—*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*. *Put on* can literally mean the putting on of clothes (Matt. 6:25); or coats (Mk. 6:9); to *array* oneself in *royal apparel* (Acts 12:21); or to be *clothed in fine linen* (Rev. 19:14). Paul longed for the day that he would be *clothed* with a heavenly, glorified body (I Cor. 15:53, 54; II Cor. 5:3). Christians who have already had the salvation experience are to dress themselves in the *armour of light* (Rom. 13:12) by walking *honestly*; not in *rioting, drunkenness, chambering, wantonness, strife, or envy* (Rom. 13:13). In so walking, they will be putting on, or clothing themselves, with Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:14). This is a separate concept from the robe of Christ's righteousness which is imputed to the sinner at the moment of faith. Those who are saved through faith are exhorted to openly model that faith by putting on the *breastplate of faith and love*, and to model the *hope of salvation* by wearing that hope as a helmet (I Thess. 5:8). Those who are already *brethren* in Christ (Eph. 6:10) are to *put on the whole armour of God* in order to *stand against the wiles of the devil* (Eph. 6:11). Christians are to openly model their election by their open practice of godliness (Col. 3:12-25). When a sinner is born again, he becomes a new man on the inside, but his flesh is still carnal. Through mortification, he is to dress himself outwardly with the new man. But in doing this, he must undress himself of the outward appearance of the old man—

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:9, 10).

This same idea is portrayed by the Apostle Paul in his concept of ritual baptism. We become *children of God* and have Christ within at the moment of faith (Gal. 3:25, 26), and we publicly model this fact when we outwardly put on Jesus Christ at our baptism (3:27). Those who are saved by grace through faith are putting on Jesus Christ each time they obey His instructions. This is particularly true when they model His grace and righteousness as a light to others.

The next powerful passage that is cited to demonstrate *baptismal regeneration* is:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (Eph. 5:25, 26).

It seems so certain that ritual baptism is in view here that *The Living Bible* paraphrases vs. 26 to read: *to make her holy and clean, washed by baptism and God's Word.*⁵

The Apostle Paul is comparing the husband's relationship to the wife with Christ's relationship to the Church. Just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the glorification of the Church, so also the Husband should be self-sacrificing toward the wife. But how and when does Christ sanctify the saint?

The term *sanctify* has a long list of separate applications throughout Scripture. The meaning in such cases carries the concepts of *separation, set apart, consecrate, dedicate* or *purify*. These meanings also have three separate applications to the saint (a *saint* is one who is sanctified).

The first application is what we refer to as *positional sanctification*. This is when Jesus Christ consecrates the believer to Himself, *without which no man shall see the Lord* (Heb. 12:14). This is when Christ's holiness and sanctity is imputed to the believer (II Cor. 5:21). This holiness is obtained through faith in Christ—

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 26:18)

In this application, all believers are *saints* regardless of their level of maturity and spirituality (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col. 1:1; Jude 1, 3). The time of this sanctification is at the moment of faith (Acts 26:18) when God imputes the holiness of Christ to the sinner and proclaims him sanctified. The means through which this sanctification is made available is the blood of Christ (Heb. 13:12; Acts 20:28) at the offering of His body (Heb. 10:10-14). This is the application which Paul had in view when he wrote Eph. 5:25, 26.

The second application of the sanctification concept has reference to the personal righteous acts of the saint wherein he separates himself, sets himself apart, consecrates himself, dedicates himself and purifies himself. This requires works of obedience to the commands of Christ, and is distinct from positional sanctification. We call this second

⁵ *The Living Bible: Paraphrased* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 951.

application *progressive sanctification*. One can be positionally sanctified and called a saint while at the same time practicing carnality and refusing to practice progressive sanctification. Paul told the Corinthians that they were *sanctified* (I Cor. 6:11) while declaring also that they were *yet carnal* (I Cor. 3:1-3). In his Second Epistle Paul told them that they had been *made the righteousness of God in Him* (positional sanctification, II Cor. 5:21), yet he exhorts them to *perfect holiness in the fear of God* (II Cor. 7:1). He calls the Ephesians *saints* (Eph. 1:1), meaning that they possessed the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet, Christ gave them apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor/teachers *for the perfecting of the saints* (Eph. 4:11, 12). He tells these positionally sanctified saints to walk as it *becometh saints* (Eph. 5:3). He tells the Thessalonians that they are already *sanctified* (positional sanctification, II Thess. 2:13), and yet he prays for their sanctification (I Thess. 5:23, 24).

This *progressive sanctification* is accomplished when the believer dresses himself with Christlikeness, as we discussed in Gal. 3:27. This should be practiced on a daily basis throughout the life of the believer. It is when the saint puts off the old man and puts on the new (Col. 3:8-12). It is when the saint yields his body as an instrument of righteousness (Rom. 6:13). It is when he presents his body as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:2). It is when he cleanses himself *from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (II Cor. 7:1). It is a lifelong pressing toward perfection. This is why Paul can speak of himself as not yet perfect and yet, in another sense, perfect:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12).

Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you (Phil. 3:15).

Thiessen says:

It is evident that one is positional perfection and the other experiential perfection. Positionally he was perfect since the day that he believed in Christ; experientially he was perfect only in a limited degree. The same Greek word is used in both verses; except that the first is a verb and the second an adjective. Col. 1:28; 4:12; Heb. 12:23 hold out perfection as a goal to be attained in the end, but not in this life. It is clear from these and other Scriptures that absolute perfection is not to be expected in this life.⁶

So, in the first application we are *set apart* from the condemnation of sin (Jn.5:24), and in the second application we are to *separate* ourselves from the *reign* of sin (Rom. 6:12). But in a third application, at the rapture of the saints, the believer will be *separated* from the very presence of sin (I Jn. 3:2; Heb. 9:28)—

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (I Thess. 3:13).

⁶ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures In Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 381, 382.

This is when the believer will never have to struggle with sin again (Rev. 22:11). It is when the believer receives a glorified body which has flesh, but without a sinful nature (Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 15:53; Phil. 3:20, 21).

There are some who take the position that *positional* and *progressive/experiential* sanctification are one and that the godly behavior of the believer is indistinguishable from

the imputed righteousness of Christ.⁷ If personal obedience is 100% an act of God, we have a difficult time explaining degrees of obedience, degrees of heavenly inheritance, degrees of reward at the judgment seat of Christ, and degrees of ruling with Christ during the Millennium.⁸

Throughout the NT believers are told to decide how faithful and obedient they will become. Their faithfulness and obedience will never be saving virtues but they will be rewardable virtues at the judgment seat of Christ. There are no degrees of salvation. One is either saved or lost. Salvation is a free gift but the prize for which Paul pressed required perseverant, obedient striving—

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Returning to Eph: 5:26, by what authority can anyone substitute the word *baptism* for the word *water*? The Greek reads *by the washing of water in the word*. The washing is in the Word, not in the water of ritual baptism. The baptismal regenerationist says that the Word is in the water, but the water of Eph. 5:26 is in the Word. Hence a literal washing but not literal water. The Water in the Word is none other than the saving grace of Jesus Christ Himself (Rev. 22:17). Jesus proclaimed the same truth to the woman at the well:

Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee,

⁷ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 33 “We must remember above all that salvation is a sovereign work of God. Biblically it is defined by what it produces, not by what one does to get it. Works are not necessary to earn salvation, But true salvation wrought by God will not fail to produce the good works that are its fruit (cf. Matthew 7:17). We are God’s workmanship. No aspect of salvation is merited by human works (Titus 3:5-7). Thus salvation cannot be defective in any dimension. As 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.”

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According To The Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), pp. 182, 106. Again MacArthur states: “Any doctrine of eternal security that leaves out perseverance distorts the doctrine of salvation itself. Heaven without holiness ignores the whole purpose for which God chose and redeemed us, p. 182. And again, “Nowhere in Scripture do we find positional righteousness set against righteous behavior, as if the two realities were innately disconnected. In fact, the apostle Paul’s teaching was diametrically opposed to the notion that *positional truth* means that we are free to sin”, p. 106.

Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw (Jn. 4:9-15).

Sanctification and cleansing are blessings attributed to the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood (Acts 20:28; Heb. 10:10-14; Heb. 13:12) and the Word of God (Jn. 17:17). The washing of Eph 5:26 is not a ritual cleansing of the body, but rather a spiritual cleansing of the soul (Heb. 10:22). Jesus also referred to the Holy Spirit as *living water* (Jn. 7:38, 39). God the Father sanctifies the believer when He reckons the righteousness of Christ to him (I Cor. 1:30). Thus sanctification is the work of the entire Trinity, distinct from ritual baptism, but apprehended at the moment of faith (Acts 26:18; II Thess. 2:13, 14). It is when the believer becomes a brother in Christ and one in Christ with all other believers (Heb. 2:11). This was a choice God made before the foundation of the earth (I Pet. 1:2). Eph. 5:26 is not speaking of ritual baptism, but of salvation by grace through faith (cf. Eph. 2:8, 9).

But Eph. 5:26 sounds even more like baptismal regeneration when quoted in conjunction with Titus 3:5—

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

In Chapter five of this present work, we cited the prominent belief that ritual baptism replaced circumcision and that baptism is circumcision in a different form. We also endeavored to refute that position thoroughly from Scripture. However, if we were incorrect, the baptismal salvationists have then proven that baptism is a work of the law just as circumcision always was a Mosaic requirement for all males—infants and proselytes (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; Rom. 4:5). Now if baptism is a righteous work of the law, then Titus 3:5 cannot be referring to ritual baptism. Unless, as some seem to hold, God irresistibly causes all of His elect to be ritually baptized.⁹

But we believe ourselves to be correct in the position that baptism did not replace circumcision. Yet still, baptism is a righteous work of obedience to one of the many commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). Therefore, the washing of Titus 3:5 cannot be ritual baptism. There is no textual basis upon which to substitute *baptism* for *washing* in this verse.

⁹ Ibid., *Gospel According To Jesus*, p. 196—"...The contemporary teaching that separates discipleship from salvation springs from ideas that are foreign to Scripture...Every Christian is a disciple. The Lord's Great Commission was to go into all the world and *make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:19, 20)...Disciples are people who believe, those whose faith motivates them to obey all Jesus commanded. The word *disciple* is used consistently as a synonym for *believer* throughout the book of Acts (6:1, 2, 7; 11:26; 14:20, 22; 15:10). Any distinction between the two words is purely artificial."

Many *baptismal regenerationists* will strongly object to that label, saying that baptism saves us but does not regenerate us. But the moment of faith and the moment of regeneration are one moment and the *washing* of Titus 3:5 and the *regeneration* are the same event, and thus not ritual baptism. If regeneration and faith are two separate moments, then we would momentarily have regenerated, saved unbelievers.¹⁰

We studied in chapter seven that the moment of regeneration and the moment of faith are the same. There are no regenerate unsaved persons and there are no saved yet unregenerate persons. Again, study the vision of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11:13, 14. How could he have been so interested in being saved when Peter had not yet given him the words *whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved* (11:14)? Notice exactly when Peter states that remission of sin is experienced—

To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

The *washing of regeneration* in Titus 3:5 is the moment in which sins are remitted, when one is born again, the moment of belief in the finished work of Christ for our salvation, and the moment we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ—*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his* (Rom. 8:9b; cf. Acts 11:15-18). This *washing* is bought for us by the fact of the physical death and shed blood of Jesus Christ—*feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood* (Acts 20:28b; cf. I Cor. 6:11). This *washing* is confirmed by the fact of His resurrection from the dead—

And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev. 1:5).

This is precisely why the saints of the *Great Tribulation* will be able to stand before the throne of God—

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:13, 14).

When the Apostle Paul said *And such were some of you: but ye are washed*, there is again no basis upon which to substitute the word *baptism* for *washed* (I Cor. 6:11). *Washed* is just another word for the *cleansing* which is accomplished by the literal blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; Rom. 3:24, 25).

Perhaps the strongest argument for baptismal regeneration is the statement: *even baptism doth also now save us*—

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened

¹⁰ This position would hold that regenerated unbelievers are spiritually alive and therefore, by sovereign decree, believe the light of the gospel. It holds that regenerated unbelievers believe the Gospel because they are already saved. *Ibid.*, *Faith Works*, p. 69—“...Believing is therefore the first act of an awakened spiritual corpse; it is the new man drawing his first breath.” Also, *Ibid.*, p. 67—“...Of course! The unsaved are *dead*, incapable of any spiritual activity. Until God quickens us, we have no capacity to respond to Him in faith.” Also, *Ibid.*, p. 65—“...But by transforming the heart, grace makes the believer wholly willing to trust and obey.”

by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him (I Pet. 3:18-22).

There are many subjects which could be addressed from this passage, but for present purposes we will limit ourselves to the relationship of baptism to salvation.

Peter is discussing pictures of salvation and draws his first analogy by using the story of Noah as a figure. The Greek in vs. 20 should read *saved through water*. The water in Noah's day was the judgment of God and is used here as a figure of the judgment of God. Noah was saved from the judgment of his day in the ark, not by the flood. Thus the ark becomes a figure of Christ and His salvation.

The ark was made of wood. As Noah acquired the lumber, the life of the trees had to be cut off.. Even so, Christ is the *root out of dry ground* (Isa. 53:2), *the branch* (Zech. 3:8), and He was *cut off* (Dan. 9:26).

The ark was covered with pitch from without and from within. The same word for *pitch* (kapher) is translated *atonement* in Lev. 17:11 and means *covering*. Christ is our atonement or covering for sin—*And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement* (Rom. 5:11). Christ not only covers, but he takes away our sin completely—*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* (Jn. 1:29).

There was only one door into the ark and there is only one door into salvation from the eternal judgment of God—

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture (Jn. 10:9).

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (Jn. 14:6).

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:11).

Just as the ark prefigures Christ's salvation, baptism postfigures the same. The Greek word for *figure* is *antitupon* meaning *a corresponding type*. Here we see two types. The ark was not a type of baptism but rather the ark and baptism are both types of Christ's salvation—the real thing. Both types point to salvation in Christ. Both types reveal that only those in Christ shall be delivered from God's coming wrath. The ark was only a type of Christ Who literally saved Noah from eternal judgment before he ever cut the first timber—*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD* (Gen. 6:8). Noah was standing in the righteousness of faith as he was building the ark—

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith (Heb. 11:7). cf. the discussion of Noah's faith in chapter three of this present work.

Baptism is also a picture, figure, or type of that which literally accomplishes our salvation—i.e. the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4; 20-23).

One thing that seems clear from I Pet. 3:21 is that baptism does not put away the *filth of the flesh*. But what is the *filth of the flesh* that baptism does not put away? We demonstrated in chapter four of this work that John's baptism was not a Jewish or Essene ritual for physical/ceremonial sanitation and cleansing. Physical sanitation was not the issue in NT discussions of the purpose of baptism. Most of John's converts had already experienced baptisms for such ritual cleansings. The three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost were Jews who did not need a bath for physical cleansing, and Peter was not asking them to submit to such. The First Epistle of Peter is addressed to Christians of Asia Minor. The churches in the provinces therein were made up of Jews and Gentiles.

When there are two possible interpretations of a passage which may be coherent with the rest of Scripture, we should refrain from being overly dogmatic. Most commentators conclude that Peter is instructing the many Jewish converts by stressing that baptism is not a physical sanitation rite. This is an acceptable and coherent interpretation of this passage. However, Peter may not be dealing with such a misconception in that the Jewish ceremonial cleansings were scrubblings for physical sanitation and were self-administered.

An alternate coherent interpretation of this passage is one in which Peter uses the phrase *filth of the flesh* as a reference to the sins of the soul. When the New Covenant and personal salvation are being discussed, *filth* and *flesh* refer to sin and the *washing* of the body refers to the cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ—

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

When the blood of Christ was applied to us at the moment of faith, our hearts were sprinkled and cleansed from the evil consciousness of sinful guilt that had not experienced atonement and removal.

Subsequent to our conversion, our fellowship with Christ is renewed daily by the same blood of Christ as we confess the sins of the flesh before Him—

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (I Jn. 1:7-10).

Thus the washing of our bodies with pure water can be interpreted to mean the daily application of the blood of Christ to our confession of the sins of the flesh.

Even at initial conversion, the circumcision without hands put off from the body the sins of the flesh—

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 (Col. 2:11).

According to Peter, this is something that ritual baptism cannot do. Christ puts *away sin by the sacrifice of Himself* (Heb. 9:26).

How did Peter use the term *flesh* elsewhere in his epistles? He used it to refer to sins committed after conversion:

That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (I Pet. 4:2).

He also uses the term *flesh* to describe the uncleanness and lust of the lost sinner:

But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government (II Pet. 2:10).

For when they speak great swelling *words* of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, *through much* wantonness (II Pet. 2:18a).

Christ used the term *flesh* as a reference to the sins of the soul (Matt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38; John 1:13; 6:63; 8:15). The Apostle Paul uses the term *flesh* as a reference to sin (Rom. 3:20; 6:19; 7:25; 8:1, 3-5, 12, 13; 13:14; I Cor. 10:2; Gal. 5:13, 16, 19, 24; 6:8; Eph. 2:3; Phil. 1:22; 3:3; I Jn. 2:16). If one consults the NIV he will notice how the term *filth* refers to sin in James 1:21 and Rev. 17:4. The NIV translates *flesh* as *sin nature* in Rom. 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-5, 8, 9, 12, 13; 13:14; I Cor. 5:5; Gal. 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24; 6:8; Eph. 2:3; Col. 2:11, 13; 3:5; II Pet. 2:10, 18.

Ezekiel did not predict the NT ordinance of baptism, but he did prophesy that the sprinkling of the blood of Christ on the heart would cleanse from the filth of the flesh:

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them* (Ez. 36:25-27).

Ezekiel used the uncleanness of a removed woman to illustrate the spiritual filthiness of the nation of Israel:

Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman (Ez. 36:16, 17).

It is this fleshly filthiness that Christ will put away through the shedding of His blood for the remission of their sins—*I will also save you from all your uncleannesses* (Ez. 36:29a). He repeatedly uses the term *filthiness* as a reference to the sins of the soul (Ez. 22:15; 24:13; 37:23). Ezekiel is speaking of the cleansing from sin in the New Covenant accomplished by the putting away of the sins of the flesh by the blood of Jesus Christ:

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20).

Proverbs is speaking of sin when it proclaims *There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness* (Prov. 30:12). Jeremiah spoke of washing the heart from wickedness (Jer. 4:14; cf. 33:8). David wanted to be

washed from his iniquity (Ps. 51:2, 3). Isaiah spoke of the Lord washing away the *filth* of the daughters of Zion (Isa. 4:4).

When the terms *washing* and *cleansing* are used in the NT in relation to salvation and regeneration, they refer to the removal of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Rev. 1:5). Even after salvation, the sins of the flesh are referred to as *filth* which is cleansed by the blood of Christ through the confession of those sins (I Jn. 1:7, 9). Christians also obtain reward and inheritance and avoid the chastising judgment of God by the extent to which they refrain from such filthiness in the first place—

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (I Cor. 7:1).

So baptism does not put away the *filth of the flesh*, but it is a *like figure* with Noah's ark of what does put away the sins of the soul—i.e. the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4).

But Peter says, (*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,*) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 3:21b). If baptism is the *answer* of a pure conscience or the *appeal* of a pure conscience, at what point does a lost person's conscience become purified before God? God makes it clear that the ordinances of the tabernacle in the OT could never heal the consciences of those who submitted to them—

The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Which *was* a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience (Heb. 9:8, 9).

But if ordinances cannot purify the conscience, then what can? The answer is in Heb. 9:13-15—

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Heb. 10:22 speaks of our hearts being sprinkled from an evil conscience, (cf. vs. 2). This is when we receive the good conscience that answers at baptism. But when is the conscience made pure? The conscience is made good by the application of the blood of Christ at the moment of faith—

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel (Heb. 12:24).

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate (Heb. 13:12).

The Apostle Peter informs the readers of I Pet. 3:21 of the exact time in which this sprinkling from an evil conscience takes place:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied (I Pet. 1:1, 2).

Baptism does not purify the conscience; it is the answer of a conscience which has already been purified by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ in the heart at the moment of faith. It is this sprinkling that enables us to enter boldly and with assurance into the holiest of all when we commune with Jesus Christ—

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. And *having* an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:19-22).

So again, Peter is not saying that baptism saves us, but rather that baptism is a like figure with Noah's ark of what does save us; what does sprinkle our hearts from an evil conscience; what does make our consciences good and able to answer or appeal to God—i.e. the finished work of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Again, John's baptism was a profession of repentance toward Jesus Christ—

Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus (Acts 19:4).

Christ's physical baptism was His identification with His own crucifixion—

But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished (Lk. 12:50).

Christ's submission to John's baptism was His consecration to die. It prefigured His death. He came to die for the remission of sins and the restoration of the nation of Israel (Lk. 1:67-79). It was this death to which He was referring when He said: *Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?* (Mk. 10:38, cf. Lk. 12:50).¹¹ Christ's death was a sinking into and a being overwhelmed by the judgment of a holy God upon the sin of humanity. Christ's baptism expressed the purpose for which He came to earth in incarnate form. His ritual baptism at the beginning of His ministry prefigured the baptism of His literal death, burial and resurrection toward the end of His earthly ministry. He was made sin for us, and therefore suffered the judgment of our sin for us (II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:6). He became one in guilt with humanity—*made in the likeness of men* (Phil. 2:7); *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom. 8:3) in order that we might be made one with God—

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and*

¹¹ This literal baptism of Christ on the cross was foreseen by David—"... I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me (Ps. 69:2b).

one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again (Jn. 10:16, 17).

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (Jn. 17:20-23).

But not as the offence, so also *is* the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is* by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Rom. 5:15-19).

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13).

When Jesus said to John the Baptist, *Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness* (Matt. 3:15), He was testifying that only in the baptism of His literal death could He *make an end of sins* and *bring in everlasting righteousness* (Dan. 9:24). He could not be *the Lord our Righteousness* (Jer. 23:6) through His ritual baptism, but by His crucifixion (II Cor. 5:21). So Jesus had a baptism of water and a baptism of blood—

This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth (I Jn. 5:6).

It was at Christ's baptism that the Holy Spirit bore witness and the Father spoke—

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16, 17).

So, at His baptism, Christ was buried in the likeness of His coming death and raised in the likeness of His coming resurrection.

Apostolic New Testament baptism is the believer's profession of faith that his salvation was promised, accomplished and confirmed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Baptism professes in symbolic form that the believer has previously entered into the communion of Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Rom.

6:3). Because we were raised with Him from the moment of faith, we were, therefore, with Him at the moment of baptism. It was not Christ's ritual circumcision and ritual baptism that saves us from our trespasses, but rather His real circumcision and baptism on the cross of Calvary—

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. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Col. 2:11-14). (Cf. the lengthy discussion of this passage in chapter five of this present work.)

The believer experientially, and in fact, participates in the death and resurrection of Christ at the moment of faith and then portrays the *likeness* of Christ's death and resurrection when he is baptized—

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection (Rom. 6:5).

So Christ's ritual circumcision portrayed His spiritual circumcision on the cross (Col. 2:11), His ritual baptism portrayed His literal death and resurrection (Matt. 10:38), and the cup that He drank portrayed the literal shedding of His blood at the crucifixion of His body (Matt. 10:38). The benefits of all this becomes ours at the moment of faith in Him (Col. 2:13, 14) and is testified to at the moment of our baptism. Christ died to make it clear once for all that salvation was not through the keeping of any ordinance. And it is God's will that all believers publicly profess their faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work for our salvation.

Therefore, it is the conviction of this present work that ritual baptism is the obedient profession, in symbolic form, that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ provided by means of His death, burial and resurrection. We do not believe that ritual baptism ratifies our salvation. Salvation is ratified by the seal of the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith—

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (II Cor. 1:21, 22).

In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13).

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his (II Tim. 2:19a).

Ritual baptism is not a promise that we will be saved. The gospel itself is God's promise that believers will have everlasting life—

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:14).

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe (Gal. 3:22).

And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel (Eph. 3:6).

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus (II Tim. 1:1).

And this is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life (I Jn. 2:25).

Ritual baptism does not reinforce our faith or confirm our faith. Our faith is reinforced and confirmed by the fact of Christ's resurrection and the apostolic testimony to that fact—

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2: 3, 4).

Ritual baptism does not strengthen our faith, nor give us assurance of salvation. Our assurance is in the object of our faith as He is recorded in Scripture—

for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (I Tim. 1:12b).

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, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (I Jn. 5:13).

Ritual baptism does not place us into the Body of Christ. We enter that Body by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the moment of faith (Acts 10:43, 44; Rom. 8:9) and prior to ritual baptism—*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* (Acts 10:47, cf. Eph. 3:6).

Therefore, when Paul said that we were *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*, he would have meant that we were already with Christ before the baptismal rite began and that is why we were still with Him when we were raised from the water. We did not get baptized in order to get with Him.

Having examined the major verses used to teach *baptismal regeneration*, we will proceed in the next chapter to discuss the proposition that the plan of salvation includes

obedience to every commandment in the NT and every doctrine of Christ and the apostles.