

## **IS BAPTISM REQUIRED TO GO TO HEAVEN?**

Some time ago, the Lord enabled me to preach a meeting for Grace Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, Brother Doug Meadows Pastor. During that week, Brother Doug gave me a copy of a book written by his brother, Michael S. Meadows, **Is Baptism Required To Go To Heaven?**

As I scanned the Table of Contents and read the **Introduction: a witness gone bad...** my interest increased. I had almost the same experience as Brother Michael Meadows when confronted with the sect known as Church of Christ, or Campbellites. I have studied the same verses Brother Michael studied and reached the same conclusions he did: we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ without any work of the flesh; whether that work is walking a church aisle, being baptized, joining a church, doing good works, or whatever. The church at Jerusalem, Acts 15, also reached this same conclusion when confronted by those who believed circumcision was essential to salvation.

I would like to recommend the 183 page, perfect bound, paperback book to you, as Brother Meadows answers the arguments of the Campbellites very adequately and kindly. He is not harsh in his criticism of their beliefs, but uncompromisingly exams their false doctrine with the complete scripture, therefore arrives at correct Biblical conclusions. There will probably minor disagreements with some of the arguments and conclusions reached by Brother Meadows, as it is seldom that all men think alike. But there will be no disagreement with the major thesis of the book: baptism is not required for salvation.

Wayne Reynolds, Pastor  
Independence Baptist Church  
Foristell, Missouri

# Is Baptism Required to go to Heaven?



**Michael S. Meadows**

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*Dedicated to*

***E. Halson and Ruth Copley***

*Hal has served as a missionary to Italy, pastored several churches and is presently Chaplain of Brookhaven Nursing Home. Through it all his lovely wife Ruth has faithfully been at his side. Their lives are a testimony of faithful service, Godly wisdom, submission to God's will, and love for our Lord Jesus.*

## *acknowledgments ...*

The author acknowledges a debt of gratitude to the following men (alphabetically): Pastor Charles Arnett (retired), Pastor Laird Baldwin, Pastor William Brown, Chaplain Hal Copley, and Pastor R. Douglas Meadows. These men were used of God to provide guidance throughout the production of the book in many different areas — checking for doctrinal accuracy, highlighting areas which required further explanation and such practical concerns as correcting grammatical errors. Thanks as well to Pastor Wilbert Ellis, Pastor Merrill Warren and Pastor Tom Wells. Their past experience with book publishing has helped make my path easier. Thanks also to Brother Ken Montgomery of the Old Paths Tract Society. After an abundance of phone conversations with this brother, I am looking forward to actually meeting him in person. To each of the men mentioned I also want to express gratitude for the prayers they offered on behalf of this work.

Most of all I want to thank my wife Barbara and our three children, David, Hannah and Jonathan, who allowed me the time to pursue this dream. Without their encouragement and patience, this work would never have been completed. I am eternally thankful for my family. They are my greatest earthly joy.

To God alone be the credit for any good which comes from this book. I believe it was He Who originally put the desire in my heart to record my thoughts in written form. It was He Who worked providentially to make me question the reason for baptism in the beginning (as described in the introduction). And of course it was His Spirit and His Word that brought me full circle and opened my eyes and heart to what I believe is the truth concerning this teaching. This book is written with all the conviction of my heart, and I believe that conviction was placed there by my Heavenly Father. May He use and bless this work as it so pleases Him.

Michael S. Meadows  
July 4, 2005

*“If there should be anything here to please the reader,  
ascribe not the writing to the pen, but to the writer;  
not the light to the lamp, but to the fountain;  
not the picture to the pencil, but to the painter;  
not the gift to the unfaithful dispenser, but to God the bountiful Giver.”*

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*“The unfortunate rendering in [Acts] 2:38 has kept entire religious bodies from the peace and motivation of free grace. It is what Christ did for us, not what we do for Him (in ritual or philanthropy) that brings forgiveness.”*

H. Leo Eddleman, President, Criswell Bible Institute,  
*“An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts”*

## *a witness gone bad ...*

Years ago while still in college I attempted to witness to an elderly man who was leaving a grocery store. It turned out that elderly man was a retired Church of Christ (Campbellite) pastor who quickly took my witness and turned it around to my disadvantage. I attempted to share with him salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, but (with my permission) he borrowed my Bible and took me to several scripture passages. These verses all seemed to contradict my witness to him and appeared to teach that we cannot go to heaven unless we are baptized. His arguments concerning *baptismal regeneration* (the belief of baptism being required for salvation; that we are “*regenerated*” or “*born again*” through the saving powers of water baptism) left me confused and uncertain as to what the Scriptures teach. My witness to him was pathetic from an earthly point of view but it did drive me to prayer and the Bible.

What did he say to me that night? Even though I now have a better understanding of what those verses actually mean, I want to show you what a powerful argument he had. Here are the verses he used plus additional verses which appear to teach that baptism saves. Before reading this I want to warn you: *just reading nothing but these verses without any other Bible study seems to prove baptism is necessary for salvation!* But there are answers to what follows and I will show you in this book why that retired pastor was wrong.

Follow with me as I try to reproduce his argument:

“Of course baptism is required for salvation. In the giving of the Great Commission, Christ Himself stated only those who believe and are baptized are saved: *‘And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.’* (Mark 16:15,16)

“Peter understood baptism was required for salvation as he preached on the day of Pentecost: *‘Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.’* (Acts 2:38)

“In fact Peter elsewhere clearly states baptism is the means of our salvation: *‘...wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ...’* (1 Peter 3:20b,21a)

“Paul agrees, stating it was through baptism he was saved. While giving his testimony in the book of Acts, Paul said the Lord had sent Ananias to lead him to Christ: *‘And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’* (Acts 22:16)

“It is through water baptism that we enter into Christ’s saving work on the cross: *‘Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.’* (Romans 6:3,4)

“Paul repeats this elsewhere: *‘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.’ (Colossians 2:10-12)*

“Paul further states baptism is how we ‘put on Christ’: *‘For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.’ (Galatians 3:27)*

“It is through baptism that we truly repent: *‘I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance.’ (Matthew 3:11)*

“It is through baptism that we receive the remission of sins: *‘John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.’ (Mark 1:4) ‘And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins’ (Luke 3:3)*

“Water baptism is therefore likened to a spiritual washing in several locations: *‘Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’ (John 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’ (Titus 3:5) ‘That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word’ (Ephesians 5:26)*

“The preceding verses clearly state that if anyone goes to heaven, he must first put his faith in Christ and then have his sins washed away in the waters of baptism.”

Taken together as done here, that is a very convincing argument. But after years of studying these verses along with the rest of the Bible, my conviction is even more firm that water baptism is not required for salvation.

The bulk of this book will be a detailed look at each of these verses to support my conclusion. After looking at each verse I will present other general reasons why baptism does not save, and then will finish with some practical lessons about baptism.

The reader will notice some repetition as we go through the controversial verses. I have found there are a few principles concerning the interpretation of these verses as a whole, and then there are also particular arguments for each of the verses. Therefore some of what is discussed for one verse may be referenced several times throughout this study.

One more item before we begin: notice how easy it is to collect some verses to prove a point. I admit these verses alone seem to prove baptism saves, but that is the problem: *“these verses alone.”* This happens all the time; most often by cults but sometimes even by well-meaning Christians who may have been misled or inaccurately taught the scriptures. This is a lesson for us all: we need to pray and study so that what we say is accurate and scriptural.

Now let us look at the verses one by one ...

## **acts 2:38 ...**

*“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*

Without question this verse is the most famous of the baptismal regeneration verses. Entire denominations have taken this as their “theme” verse. Songs are written concerning this statement. It may be seen on bumper stickers and is even the thrust behind some humor (you’ve heard the joke of the lady stopping the burglar with “*an axe and two .38 caliber pistols*”?). Therefore it would be proper to begin our study with this verse.

**GRAMMAR ALONE CANNOT EXPLAIN THIS VERSE** — In order for this verse to be interpreted as teaching baptismal regeneration, Peter must have meant we are “*baptized in order to have my sins forgiven.*” Peter was a first-century Jew, speaking here to Hebrews gathered from various places for the feast of Pentecost. He was probably speaking in Aramaic (we may assume that, even though everyone heard in their own language, known as the “glossalalia” or the “tongues” miracle) and his statements are preserved for us in Greek, the original language of the New Testament. Are we to suppose that *any* of us are so knowledgeable with their languages and culture that we can merely read the verse and determine Peter’s intent beyond any doubt? Is it not at least possible there are several ways in which we may understand what Peter meant?

Many Bible teachers and commentators point out that another way we may understand this verse is “*be baptized because my sins have been forgiven*” or “*be baptized in reference to the fact that my sins have been forgiven.*” The difference between these interpretations depends entirely upon how one understands the word “*for.*” Those who believe in baptismal regeneration will take the word “*for*” in one way, those who do not believe in baptismal regeneration will take it the other way.

Is there any way we can prove without doubt which was the meaning of Peter? On grammar alone, no we cannot. Both those who defend baptismal regeneration and those who oppose that teaching have ample support from Greek and English equivalent readings. Both camps also have ample support from various New Testament translations, some of which favor the baptismal regeneration view and others of which do not favor that understanding. Many commentators can be quoted from each camp who go into great detail about the Greek word εἰς (eis) which is here translated “*for.*” The only thing either side ultimately ends up doing however is showing there are others who also hold what they believe.

Therefore any arguments based on grammar alone are fruitless. Greek scholar Dr. A. T. Robertson agrees

with this conclusion:

“*Unto the remission of your sins* (eis aphenin tōn hamartiōn hūmōn). This phrase is the subject of endless controversy as men look at it from the standpoint of sacramental or of evangelical theology. In themselves the words can express aim or purpose for that use of *eis* does exist as in 1 Cor. 2:7 *eis doxan hēmōn* (for our glory). But then another usage exists which is just as good Greek as the use of *eis* for aim or purpose. It is seen in Matt. 10:41 in three examples *eis onoma prophētou, dikaiou, mathētou* where it cannot be purpose or aim, but rather the basis or ground, on the basis of the name of prophet, righteous man, disciple, because one is, etc. It is seen again in Matt. 12:41 about the preaching of Jonah (*eis to kērugma Iōnā*). They repented because of (or at) the preaching of Jonah. The illustrations of both usages are numerous in the N.T. and the *Koiné* generally (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 592). ***One will decide the use here according as he believes that baptism is essential to the remission of sins or not.*** My view is decidedly against the idea that Peter, Paul, or any one in the New Testament taught baptism as essential to the remission of sins or the means of securing such remission. So I understand Peter to be urging baptism on each of them who had already turned (repented) and for it to be done in the name of Jesus Christ on the basis of the forgiveness of sins which they had already received.” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 3 pg. 35f; bold / italic emphasis mine]

So the place to begin is here: ***it is impossible for the meaning of this verse to be found within this verse alone.*** All the word studies by themselves can neither prove nor disprove how this verse is to be interpreted. Therefore we must look elsewhere to determine Peter’s intent. Those observations will be found in the next few points.

**PETER RESPONDED TO THE QUESTION ASKED** — One manner in which we could view Acts 2:38 is that Peter was merely responding to what the hearers were asking:

“*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37)

To which Peter responded with the verse in question: “*Repent and be baptized,*” or, if we could expand a little on what Peter was saying, “*Repent and show forth that salvation by obedience to Christ’s command, identifying yourself with Christ and His followers*” (this interpretation will be considered in more detail below). Compare Peter’s response with that of Paul’s when he was directly asked by the Philippian jailer,

“*What must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30)

Paul’s answer is brief, to the point and does not mention baptism:

“*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*” (Acts 16:31)

What an error if baptism were required for salvation! But Peter was answering the question put to him: *what are we to do?* Peter responded by saying *trust Christ and live a life pleasing unto Him*. But when asked directly about salvation Paul responded with one word: *believe*.

This explains the reason for this book. If there are verses which when gathered together as done in my “failed witness” above seem to indicate baptism is required to go to heaven, why are there those who reject that teaching? This statement by Paul along with the others written later in the book explains why: because ***there are other passages of Scripture which makes it abundantly clear baptism is not required to go to heaven!*** How does one who believes in baptismal regeneration reconcile Paul’s statement with their

teaching? Directly asked how to be saved, Paul responds “*By faith alone.*” What about baptism? Why is that omitted? The Bible does not contradict itself, therefore how are we to reconcile these differences?

It has been my experience those who teach baptismal regeneration do not explain verses such as Paul’s in Acts 16:31; rather they go to one of the verses given above in my “failed witness.” This implies somehow Paul did require baptism for salvation but it was not mentioned at this point. But the Word of God is fully given by the Holy Spirit, therefore anything added or omitted was the intentional purpose of God. What a mistake for God to keep such statements out of the Word of God if that is true.

In these studies I would rather consider all these passages as a whole and pray how these things may be brought together, rather than believing bits and pieces of the Word of God and ignoring other passages. As we consider the culture at the time, I believe we may easily reconcile Peter’s statement in Acts 2:38 with the other passages which indicate salvation is through repentance and faith by the grace of God. For now, let us continue with more evidences to show Peter was not teaching baptismal regeneration in Acts 2:38.

**BAPTISM IS NOT MENTIONED AS A REQUIREMENT IN EVERY OTHER RECORDED SERMON BY PETER** — In Acts chapter two we have the famous message at the day of Pentecost, but in Acts chapter three we have another message given by Peter very soon afterwards (we have no way of knowing exactly when this second message was given but all implications are it was not long after Pentecost). In this next recorded message of Peter he gives the basis of salvation as repentance:

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”* (Acts 3:19).

Notice Peter makes no mention of baptism, just repentance. The same thing may be seen in Peter’s message to the house of Cornelius in Acts chapter ten:

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

Notice here Peter again does not mention baptism, just faith.

So in the only other two recorded sermons Peter gives he never mentions baptism as a requirement to go to heaven, only faith and repentance. Therefore it would be proper, in the light of these other calls to salvation by Peter himself, to understand Acts 2:38 as not requiring baptism in order to be forgiven.

Prior to continuing, we should consider one possible objection. Someone reading this might respond by stating, “*But Peter is giving several ‘requirements’ to go to heaven. In one verse Peter says our salvation is based upon repentance, in another verse he says our salvation is based upon faith. Why could we not say that Acts 2:38 is just another of those verses, that our salvation is also based upon baptism?*” The answer to that objection is this: theologians have long considered the act of repentance and faith as a single, inseparable act. By that the theologians mean it is impossible to truly repent without having saving faith, and it is also impossible to have true saving faith without repentance. Therefore repentance and faith are two sides of a coin, each impossible to have without the other.

It is my firm conviction that the basis for anyone to go to heaven is this “two-sided coin.” The only thing anyone must do is repent from their sin and place their trust in Christ alone for salvation. For that reason,

Peter could one time say “*Repent to be saved*” and then at another time say “*Believe to be saved*” and not contradict himself. But baptism is not an act which always coincides with faith and repentance, as a “two-sided coin.” Therefore to add baptism or anything else as a requirement to go to heaven is to change the gospel message. ***The gospel message is repent and believe, not repent and believe plus anything else, whether that be baptism, church membership, good works, or whatever.***

**ACTS 2:38 AS INTERPRETED BY PETER HIMSELF** — Peter preached on the day of Pentecost in which he gave the sermon containing the verse we are studying. Fast forward now to when Peter preaches the gospel to another group, this time Gentiles instead of Jews (Acts chapter ten). The Gentiles respond in faith and are baptized, but Peter is called into question for his actions by the leaders at Jerusalem (remember at this time to have a non-Jew accept the gospel was a new event and one needing discussion). While giving his explanation as to what happened, Peter made this statement:

*“Forasmuch then as God gave [the Gentiles] the like gift as he did unto us [Jewish believers], who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When [the leaders at Jerusalem] heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”* (Acts 11:17,18)

Peter says how could he fight what God was doing since the Gentiles also believed in Christ? Note nothing here is mentioned of baptism. If it was a requirement for salvation, Peter would have continued by including that the Gentiles were baptized. But it was enough for Peter to say “*God is saving the Gentiles just like He’s saving us Jews. The Gentiles are believing the gospel and trusting Christ.*” Nothing of baptism is mentioned.

“*But the Gentiles were baptized in Acts 10:48.*” Yes that is true, but not only does Peter not mention that in his account to the Jerusalem leaders, Peter also makes it clear the reason the Gentiles were baptized in the first place was that Peter was convinced by God the Gentiles had indeed been saved just as he was:

*“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?”* (Acts 10:44-47)

This is important: the reason Peter knew these Gentiles were truly saved was because they had the Holy Spirit, something which is not possible for one that is not part of the family of God:

*“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”* (Romans 8:9)

Therefore we see Peter baptized the Gentiles only because he was confident they had truly experienced saving grace.

In another separate incident later in the life of Peter we have further evidence of what Peter meant in Acts 2:38. At what is known as the Council of Jerusalem in Acts chapter fifteen, Peter again recalls the day of Pentecost:

*“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 meeting was called in Jerusalem by the leaders to discuss the question of how much Jewish ritualism was a requirement for the Christian life. Again, remember this was a time of transition when the Jewish believers were dealing with what to do with the Gentile believers, none of whom followed Jewish traditions. The Council resolved to give great liberty in Christ with little of the Jewish traditions being required for Christian living (Acts 15:19,20). That is beyond the scope of our present discussion however. The important thing for us is the emphasis Peter gave to faith in the matter of salvation, not baptism. Peter states that he was chosen by God to give the gospel to the Gentiles so they may believe (Acts 15:7) and that the Gentiles are accepted by the Lord in similar manner as the Jews (Acts 15:8, making salvation the same for both Jew and Gentile). He continues by stating those saved receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8), have their hearts purified by faith (Acts 15:9), and are saved by grace (Acts 15:11). All of this discussion concerning salvation without a mention of baptism. If baptism were a requirement for salvation, it would have been a great error to omit it from the things being discussed.

We can therefore interpret Acts 2:38 by statements given by Peter himself concerning what happened on the day of Pentecost in both Acts chapters ten, eleven and Acts chapter fifteen. In all these instances baptism is not a requirement for salvation, therefore we may conclude Peter was not making it a requirement in Acts 2:38.

**THE NEW BIRTH AS INTERPRETED BY PETER HIMSELF** — What is said to occur during baptism by some is called the *new birth*, being *born again* or in more theological terms, being *regenerated*. This is evident even in the term *baptismal regeneration*. So not only is it important to see what else the Bible has to say about baptism, it is also important to see what the Bible says about the new birth.

If we stay with Peter since he was the spokesman at Pentecost when Acts 2:38 was preached, we see that Peter elsewhere attributes the new birth to the death of Christ and the spiritual application of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit:

*“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot ... being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” (1 Peter 1:18,19,23)*

If Peter was preaching in Acts 2:38 that both faith and baptism were required to be born again then he would have mentioned baptism when describing the new birth. But Peter even states the opposite! Not only does he *not* mention baptism but he even states we are *not* redeemed by “*corruptible things*” or “*traditions received from our fathers.*” Baptism is a physical, corporeal ritual and therefore “corruptible.” Baptism is also a traditional rite, a church ordinance passed down from our spiritual forefathers. By saying this is not to imply there is anything wrong with baptizing because it is one of our Christian duties to follow the Lord obediently. But baptism *is* an ordinance, a religious ritual, and it is earthly and physical versus the spiritual.

Peter says here we cannot be saved by such things.

To sum up Peter's message therefore: our salvation is spiritual, involving the sacrificial death of Christ ("redeemed ... by the precious blood of Christ," v19) and the application of the Word of God to our hearts by the Holy Spirit (v23). We are not saved by baptism or any church ritual. We may then assume Peter was not teaching we need to be baptized to be born again in Acts 2:38.

**THE LAWS OF LANGUAGE** — Another difficulty not quite so apparent in many of our English versions is the Greek word usage. Peter tells his listeners to *repent* (which is a second-person plural command), to be *baptized* (which is a third-person singular passive command, meaning they are acted upon rather than doing the action), and they shall *receive* the gift of the Holy Spirit (which is also a second-person plural). These seemingly minor differences make a distinction which is important to our discussion. Quoting again from Greek scholar A. T. Robertson:

*"Repent ye (metanoēsate). First aorist active imperative. Change your mind and your life. Turn right about and do it now. You crucified this Jesus. Now crown him in your hearts as Lord and Christ. This first. And be baptized every one of you (kai baptisthētō hekastos hūmōn). Rather, 'And let each one of you be baptized.' Change of number from plural to singular and of person from second to third. This change marks a break in the thought here that the English translation does not preserve. The first thing to do is make a radical and complete change of heart and life. Then let each one be baptized after this change has taken place, and the act of baptism be performed 'in the name of Jesus Christ.'" [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 3 pg. 34f; bold / italic emphasis mine]*

This means baptism has nothing to do with receiving the Holy Spirit, an act that occurs at the moment of our salvation (Romans 8:9). Taking Acts 2:38 in this manner then, the sense is "*ye all (plural) repent and receive the Holy Spirit, and you (each one, singular) who have repented and have received the Holy Spirit should be baptized.*" This is brought out in several translations that emphasize the original Greek word nuances:

*"Peter said to them, 'You must repent — and, as an expression of it, let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ — that you may have your sins forgiven: and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38, William's NT)*

*"And Peter said to them, Have a change of mind, that change of mind being accompanied by abhorrence of and sorrow for your deed, and let each one of you be baptized upon the ground of your confession of belief in the sum total of all that Jesus Christ is in His glorious Person, this baptismal testimony being in relation to the fact that your sins have been put away, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38, Wuest's Expanded NT)*

Peter therefore places a clear distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit when we believe (at which point we are saved and accepted by the Lord) and baptism.

**CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** — It is evident Peter was not telling his listeners that they must be baptized in order to have their sins forgiven in Acts 2:38. What did Peter mean then when he said "*Repent and be baptized*"? To answer that question, we must understand the purpose of baptism in the first place.

One of the main reasons for a believer to be baptized is that it identifies the one baptized to be a follower and disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our American culture, this often comes without cost. One declares his

or her desire to follow the Lord in baptism, he or she often meets with representatives from the church to ensure the person understands the nature of salvation and baptism, and then that person is baptized. It is usually a cheerful event in which other family members are invited to watch and some even have parties following the baptism. Pictures are taken and everyone expresses their satisfaction with the decision to follow the Lord.

We often forget it is not like that in all cultures. Consider the cost of a Chinese Christian being baptized by an underground house-church. That person is literally risking his reputation, his employment, possibly his relationship with his family, and perhaps even his life. It could cost the Chinese believer a great deal to follow the Lord in baptism. But by doing so, that believer is taking a stand: *“I lived unto myself prior to my salvation but am now ‘under new management.’ I no longer control my life; my life is hid in Christ and He is my Lord and Master. By the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I will live in obedience to the Scriptures.”* This is true in other cultures as well: in the not-too-distant past the same statements could have been said of those saved under Communist Russia rule. In some Muslim-ruled areas it may mean death to profess Christ. Even in our culture, for an orthodox Jew to accept Jesus may cost him in ways that may be hard for some of us who are not Jewish to understand.

This was the environment of the New Testament. Christianity sprang forth from Judaism and while we today understand Christianity as “completed Judaism” (Jesus being the Messiah the Jews were awaiting), to the Jews Christianity was looked upon very much as we look upon Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism or any other cult. For the first century Jew, to trust in Jesus might cost the believer his reputation, his employment, and during some times historically, even his life (thus the reason behind writing the book of Hebrews: *“stay with it ... don’t fall away back into Judaism ... Christ is the fulfillment and better ... ”*).

That is what it meant to embrace Jesus and take a public stand in baptism. For those who heard Peter preach that day, they heard Peter tell them that they must not only place their faith in the sacrificial death of the Risen Savior, but they were also asked to prove their allegiance by submitting to baptism. To those Jews, this was not a “picture taking” ceremony; rather, their public commitment to the Lord may have cost some their social and religious standing. This was not a mindless act, an emotional decision made after several verses of an invitational hymn. Rather it was a decision which required thought and consideration: *“What might I lose by making such a decision? Can I handle the breaking of family ties? How will my spouse react? Would I even lose (him / her)? I may even be cast out of the synagogue. Will that happen or will I be accepted? At this stage in my life, can I afford to have problems in my career? Can I find other work if my decision affected my job? They are expecting me to become a disciple of One that had the entire city in an uproar less than two months ago. Is placing my faith in this Man worth it?”* John MacArthur states the situation in these terms:

“Baptism would mark a public break with Judaism and identification with Jesus Christ. Such a drastic public act would help weed out any conversions which were not genuine. In sharp contrast to many modern gospel presentations, Peter made accepting Christ difficult, not easy. By so doing, he followed the example of our Lord Himself (Luke 14:26-33; 18:18-27). Baptism was always *in the name of Jesus Christ*. That was the crucial identification, and the cost was high for such a confession.” [MacArthur, *Acts 1-12*; pg 73; emphasis his]

Why did Peter make the demands that he did when he preached at Pentecost? I believe Peter's use of the word *baptism* in Acts 2:38 could be summed up as requiring evidence of salvation.

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?** — What I have shown is that admittedly, taking the verse alone, Peter may have been stating baptism is required to go to heaven. But as we looked throughout the rest of the New Testament we found other verses which based our salvation on the merits of Christ's death and resurrection, applied to our hearts through repentance and faith alone. One example cited was "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31). So immediately there was cause to further investigate Peter's meaning in Acts 2:38.

As we considered Peter's statement alone, we found it may be interpreted in several different ways, depending upon how we understood the word "*for.*" As we looked at the verse alone and the immediate context, we discovered it was impossible to prove beyond any doubt which was the correct way to interpret the word "*for.*" To discover how Peter intended his statement therefore required us to look at other verses to compare the meanings (although by looking at the original Greek it was possible to discover baptism was not connected to repentance and receiving the Holy Spirit, implying which was the correct interpretation; but we continued to consider other evidences as well).

While staying with Peter since he was the main spokesman on the day of Pentecost, we discovered in every other recorded message he preached Peter did not mention baptism but only repentance and faith (in Acts chapters three and ten). In fact, in Acts chapter ten we discovered Peter did not consent to baptism until he understood the Gentiles to whom he was preaching were truly saved. We also discovered that when Peter would make reference to the day of Pentecost (in Acts chapters ten, eleven and fifteen) Peter would repeatedly say salvation is by grace through faith without mentioning baptism.

We then turned to other writings of Peter in which he spoke of the new birth. We noted this is important because some would argue we are *born again* or *regenerated* during baptism. We saw that Peter specifically stated the new birth was an act of the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to the hearts of sinners (1 Peter 1:18,19,23). This passage was doubly important because not only was baptism not mentioned as required, Peter even stated the new birth was *not* accomplished by any church ritual, baptism or the Lord's Table or whatever that human ordinance might be.

Having learned that Peter was not stating on the day of Pentecost that baptism is required to go to heaven, we had yet to discover what Peter was trying to say. The question became "*If baptism is not required to go to heaven, why did Peter mention it at all in Acts 2:38?*" The answer to that question came when we considered the reason for baptism. By understanding the culture in which the early disciples found themselves, one in which Christianity was considered a cult by the orthodox of the day, we saw how baptism was more than a church ritual. Baptism at that time made a definite statement, one which might cost a person his reputation, his employment and at times even his life. Baptism signified a new life under the leadership of Christ Jesus (admittedly baptism should mean the same today, but in our culture much of the significance has been lost). I believe we proved what Peter was stating that day on Pentecost was this: "*Repent and show forth that salvation by obedience to Christ's command, identifying yourself with Christ and His followers,*" or "*Repent and give evidence of that salvation by identifying yourselves with Christ by baptism.*" This gives explanation to Peter's statement without twisting the Scripture nor contradicting the rest of the New Testament.

## *mark 16:16 ...*

*“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*

**CONSIDER THE NEGATIVE** — After having just learned how Peter used the word *baptism* in Acts 2:38 to be the evidence of true saving faith, the question arises whether the writer here in Mark 16:16 is not doing the same. Is there any Biblical evidence that will indicate to us whether this verse is teaching baptismal regeneration or if he is making the same statement as Peter in Acts 2:38?

The answer to that is fortunately yes, there is support to help us interpret this verse. The author makes the statement as a positive, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,”* but then makes a change when repeating the same statement as a negative: *“but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* While that may appear to be such a minor issue to some, the point begins to take upon itself more importance when one expands that thought to the entire New Testament. Consider this truth: *Scriptures clearly indicate that if one does not believe he is condemned (John 3:18,19,36; 5:24; 8:24; Romans 5:1) and if one does not repent he will perish (Luke 13:3-5). But not once is it said “if you are not baptized, you are not saved.”*

“The omission of baptized with ‘disbelieveth’ would seem to show that Jesus does not make baptism essential to salvation. Condemnation rests on disbelief, not on baptism. So salvation rests on belief. Baptism is merely the picture of the new life not the means of securing it.” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*; vol. 1 pg. 369]

“The only place I know that says a man that believeth and is not baptized shall be damned is found in the Mormon Bible in 3<sup>rd</sup> Nephi 11:33-34.” [from the tract *What Saves? Baptism or Jesus Christ?* by Buddy Bryant; published by Tabernacle Baptist Church]

As proven in Acts 2:38, baptism was often used in the New Testament as evidence of a new life under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ. The commands *“believe and be baptized”* may be understood to mean *“believe and show forth that belief by living a life of submission to the commands of Christ, beginning with baptism.”* Therefore Mark could write *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* without conflicting the issue as he stated the negative: *“but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* To Mark, the critical element was faith, not baptism. Dr. B. H. Carroll has this to say about these observations:

“It does not make any difference how many things one may put in — believe, be baptized, keep the law, go to church — with salvation, it does not affect salvation. If the first one was to secure salvation, it will be true if you put all of them in. That will not take away from the truth. He that believeth hath everlasting life; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Some would make it

read: ‘He that believeth and is baptized and goes to church every Sunday, etc., etc., etc., hath everlasting life.’ You can put in as many as you please and they all follow from the first one. But to put it negatively, you could not say, ‘He that does not go to church every Sunday will be lost.’ And in negation it does not say, ‘He that believeth not and is not baptized’ — it stops at the believer.” [Carroll, *Interpretation of the English Bible*; vol. 5, pg. 97]

**FAITH PLUS WHAT?** — To further illustrate the point made above, let us consider another passage which is phrased in a similar manner:

*“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* (Romans 10:9,10)

Those who would reject our interpretation of Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 must therefore accept Romans 10:9,10 in the strictest literal sense to remain consistent. Paul here says *“believe and make public confession”* but nothing about baptism. That begs the question: is salvation now a matter of faith *plus* baptism *plus* public confession? If so, why is something as important as the plan of salvation scattered throughout the New Testament, needing to be searched out and added together as a mathematical equation? And if that is true, then this statement is also true: *“there is not one single place in the New Testament where the complete plan of salvation is given.”* That thought is inconceivable.

Imagine this scenario: *“To go to heaven requires a verse on faith and repentance (easy enough; those verses are scattered throughout the entire New Testament), a verse requiring us to be baptized (that is a little more difficult; there are only a half dozen verses in the New Testament which makes such an implication), and a verse requiring us to make public confession (much more difficult; that statement is found only once in Romans — although I imagine we could find more support from the gospels if necessary).”*

Is that how the Holy Spirit gave us the Scriptures? Would not something as important as our eternal salvation have that plan of salvation in simple terms somewhere? What if someone only had a portion of Scripture that says we must trust Christ alone for salvation without any mention of baptism? Or when applying the same principle to Paul’s statement in Romans chapter ten, what if someone thought it was faith plus baptism but did not have the book of Romans and therefore never understood salvation depended upon public confession of Christ? Would that person be lost?

The answer to Romans 10:9,10 as well as Mark 16:16 is that ***salvation is solely by trusting in the merits of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross; that is, salvation is entirely through faith in Christ alone. This faith however brings forth obedience and a changed life, including our identifying ourselves with Him by public confession (Romans 10:9,10) as well as by baptism (Mark 16:16).***

**SALVATION IS A SPIRITUAL ACT** — To further illustrate the relationship of repentance and faith (purely spiritual acts) with external evidences as baptism and public confession, allow me to relate something that happened about the same time as my “failed witness.”

I worked in Cincinnati while attending college and some of my best fellowship was with a man who was a lay-preacher with a jail ministry (I will call him Jim; not his real name). One of the young men who worked with Jim went out on a payday and spent his money partying. The night ended with this young man’s car going out of control and hitting a chain which prohibited entry down a country lane. The young man was pinned by the chain to his car seat and slowly suffocated. After the funeral as Jim and I discussed the events

of that evening, Jim made a surprising comment. He had witnessed to his fellow worker several times and it had been rejected, as indicated in his final night of revelry. Jim's comment was this: "*What a sad way to die. Imagine lying there suffocating, unable to catch a breath, unable to call upon the Lord even if he had wanted to.*"

I was shocked by his interpretation of Romans 10:9,10. What he meant was this: if in the final moments of this young man's life he recognized the folly of his ways and in his heart repented of his sins; yet because he was unable to draw breath to *physically* cry out to the Lord, this young man could not be saved. *What a poor understanding of the working of salvation!*

***Our eternal destiny is an inward, spiritual matter!*** We are born sinners in rebellion to our Creator God. The problem is not so much *what we do* (externally) but rather *who we are* (internally). Or stated another way: the problem is not so much that we *sin* but that we are *sinners by nature*. When by the working of the Holy Spirit we are able to recognize our sinful condition in our heart and soul, understand we are lost, understand we are unable to do anything to merit our salvation, understand the Son of God took our place on the cross and is resurrected — if at that point we believe and repent, we are saved! Our simple heartfelt faith, the cry of our heart to God spiritually is our salvation! We at that moment are born again, we are justified in His sight, we are forgiven based on the merits of His Son.

*NOW* — having done that inward act — there will by necessity be things which follow, all in obedience to Christ our new Master. One of these things will be a public identification that He is now our Savior (Romans 10:9,10). Another thing, perhaps after having been taught some of our scriptural obligations, there will be baptism in obedience to Christ's command and to further identify ourselves with Him and His people (Mark 16:16; Romans 6:1-4). Other things will naturally follow: prayer, Bible reading and studying, fellowship with His people, growth as we recognize more and more the ways in which we need to please the Lord — the efforts of a lifetime. *But it all sprang forth from that spiritual, internal submission to the Lord, that single act of faith in the work of Christ and His resurrection.*

Lest there be any confusion in what I am teaching, let me repeat this negatively to clarify: ***the actual condition for salvation is faith and repentance, not the works that follow.*** Neither Peter nor the author here in Mark 16:16 nor any New Testament writer states we must have good works as a requirement for heaven. ***But the New Testament is united in teaching faith does bring forth works.*** Those works may not be perfect and there is certainly a growth aspect, in which the believer submits as the Lord reveals things in the believer's life which require attention, *but there will be a definite change of life!* All that comes forth shows that faith to be genuine saving faith, but it does not have saving power in and of itself.

To return to my friend's comment: if that young man in his final moments of life truly saw His need of Christ and turned to Him with all his heart, that young man was saved even though he could not physically cry out with his lips to God. ***Salvation is spiritual and internal; everything else follows that single act of faith.***

## **acts 22:16 ...**

*“And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, LORD? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 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 22:6-16)*

So far we have seen many arguments as to why Acts 2:38 and Mark 16:16 do not teach that baptism is required to go to heaven. Central to the preceding arguments however is the major principle that the early Christians demanded evidence of true saving faith, that evidence being first and foremost a willingness to step outside the social norm and accept baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews considered Christianity a cult which attacked their traditions, and the pagans often considered Christians as atheists since their idols were cast aside. No believer lightly accepted baptism at that time.

In Acts 22:16 we are introduced to our second major principle.

**THE JEWISH USE OF EXAGGERATION AND METAPHORS** — A problem with any interpretation of Scripture is we often evaluate what we read through the eyes of modern twenty-first-century Gentile American believers. The New Testament was directed (or directly related) to first-century Judaism. We often unintentionally put our cultural views into the culture of the New Testament. They do not fit.

Attempting to understand the cultural factors involved in the Jewish / New Testament era is therefore very important, not only concerning baptismal regeneration but all aspects of New Testament studies. One such cultural nuance that relates to our discussion is the Jewish use of exaggerated, symbolic language to stand in the place of reality. For example Jesus said the following:

*“And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life,*

*than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”* (Mark 9:43-48)

Several items here help us better understand the culture of the time. First, Jesus is obviously not telling us to literally cut off our hands nor pluck out our eyes. Jesus repeatedly spoke of sin being spiritual and inward, therefore literally cutting off a hand or physically plucking out an eye does not touch the root of sin. What Jesus was emphasizing was the importance of living a holy life. We are to take drastic measures to remove sin from our life, expressed in such extreme terms as “cutting off your hand, plucking out your eye.” Again, not physically but one may easily see how critically important such action was for Jesus to express Himself in such a manner.

Secondly and in similar fashion, note how Jesus portrays one condemned as being where their “worm” does not die. Jesus is not speaking of a physical earthworm but rather is painting a picture of a man’s soul in its final degenerate state when eternally cast off. Jesus took a physical thing of which everyone was familiar and used it metaphorically to get across His message. Those listening to Him at that time did not have a problem understanding what He meant. They may not have agreed with Him and probably did not like what He had to say, but they clearly understood Him.

Another example closer to our discussion may be found in the gospel of Mark:

*“They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, 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? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”* (Mark 10:37-40)

Note Jesus speaks of baptism and drinking a cup, neither of which is literal in this passage. No one teaches Jesus was here speaking of “baptism” in the sense of water baptism, not even those who believe in baptismal regeneration. Even the disciples’ response showed they fully understood Jesus was not speaking literally. When Jesus said, “*Can you be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*” the disciples did not respond, “*Yes, we all have the baptism of John.*” Rather they understood Him to be taking physical things (baptism and the cup) and using the terms symbolically. When He spoke of His “baptism” and “drinking the cup” Jesus was summing up His spiritual responsibilities, burdens and future affliction, to which the disciples responded, “*We can.*” Again, those listening to Jesus at that time had no problem understanding His intentions. It was part of their culture to speak in such a fashion. It should also be noted that Jesus was not denying a real, physical baptism nor a real, physical Passover cup. But He was taking the physical and using it in an illustrative or symbolic sense to make a point.

Am I trying to teach the Bible cannot be taken literally and all verses are to be interpreted in a “code-like” fashion? No, obviously if one taught that then it would remove all meaning from the Bible. But there are two principles of Bible interpretation that have been accepted by Bible students throughout the ages that are especially important to our discussion. The first principle is this:

***Scripture must be taken literally and at face value unless there are reasons which determine otherwise.***

The second principle is closely related to the first and is known as *analogia scriptura* (the analogy of scripture):

***Scripture is a whole and does not contradict other Scripture; therefore by examining the Bible as a whole allows us to interpret questionable passages.***

Dr. B. H. Carroll makes the application of these principles in this manner:

“The trend of the Bible must govern a literal, grammatical construction of a single passage. The passage must harmonize with clear, abundant passages elsewhere. If the book teaches in a thousand passages that only the blood of Christ, apprehended by faith, can take away sin, we are not warranted in attributing to an external rite the same power, merely on the ground of literal, grammatical construction in a few passages. These few detached passages concerning external rites must be interpreted in harmony with the spiritual trend of the entire revelation. That is an unquestioned principle of interpretation.” [Carroll, *Interpretation of the English Bible*; vol. 5, pg. 90]

For example, in the first illustration given above: could Jesus have meant to physically cut off our hand or pluck out our eye? Some have unfortunately taken His statement to such literal extremes in church history, but when we take the Bible as a whole we see God condemns such self-mutilation (Leviticus 19:28; 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1; compare the Baal worshipers in 1 Kings 18:28). And as mentioned above, Jesus taught the root of sin was spiritual not physical; therefore any physical deed could not remove the spiritual root of sin. Using our principles of Bible interpretation then, we can see there is strong biblical support to interpret these verses in a symbolic fashion. I might add that all commentators I have ever read accept those terms as exaggerations and metaphors. No commentator interprets these verses in the most literal sense.

Now let us apply these commonly accepted rules of interpretation to Paul’s statement in Acts 22:16. As we first approach this verse, we must accept it literally and at face value:

*“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

Admittedly this may be taken to mean water baptism is a requirement for salvation. But as we will note in the points below as well as what we have already learned, that interpretation produces conflicts with other passages. Since Scripture is a whole, there must be another explanation. By considering the Jewish cultural considerations we may understand Paul to be taking a real, physical thing (baptism) and using it as a symbol of a spiritual truth, something understood and accepted by his listeners.

Let us continue now to give the reasons for Paul not being literal in his testimony of baptism “*washing away his sins.*”

**CONSIDER THE AUDIENCE** — One item of importance in the Jewish use of symbolic language is the consideration of the audience. This cultural nuance was widely accepted among the Jews but one not always present in other cultures. In our previous examples, it is important to note that the audience was always other Jews. They were more careful with their terminology when speaking to Gentiles. This is particularly obvious in our present passage.

Who was Paul's audience in Acts 22:16? Paul in Acts chapter twenty-two is giving his defense to the Jews who had just attacked him for what they believed to be a breach in his ceremonial cleanliness. After the Roman authorities brought the crowd under control, Paul was allowed to speak to his attackers. In that speech Paul attempts to explain how he came to accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. During his testimony of salvation, Paul makes the statement taken by some to teach baptismal regeneration:

*“Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

Let us go now to when Paul gave the exact same testimony, only this time he was speaking to a Gentile, King Agrippa:

*“Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 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.” (Acts 26:12-18)*

Much of this testimony is the same as Paul gave in Acts chapter twenty-two with one notable exception: the omission of Paul's baptism. Therefore while giving his testimony to the Jews Paul does not hesitate to mention baptism, but when standing before a Gentile Paul does not even mention the visit of Ananias. If baptism is required for salvation, what a strange testimony it would be to give the facts leading up to salvation but never mentioning how he was really saved!

The answer to that of course is exactly what we have seen elsewhere: Paul used baptism as a symbol when speaking to a group who understood that kind of language. To the Jews, Paul was using his literal baptism in a symbolic sense to illustrate the cleansing aspect of salvation. But when speaking to those outside of the Jewish culture, Paul refrained from making such mention of baptism. It is also worth noting that whenever Paul would give his testimony, he never began at his baptism by Ananias but always returned to the road of Damascus. This further indicates that to Paul, his salvation testimony was what occurred on the road to Damascus, not his baptism.

Therefore what at first appears to be a great difficulty actually becomes one of the best illustrations of what I am trying to explain. Paul was not preaching which may vary from time to time but was giving his personal testimony of salvation. Yet to one audience (the Jews) Paul mentions the “cleansing aspects of baptism” while to a different audience (the Gentiles) Paul refrains from mentioning baptism at all. What better proof could there be that Paul spoke to each group in a manner each would understand?

**OTHER EVIDENCES FROM PAUL'S TESTIMONY** — Let us now consider further arguments against baptismal regeneration being found in these verses. As we combine the testimonies given by Paul

and the historical events themselves in Acts chapter nine, we find other indications of when Paul was really saved. In Acts 9:6 and 26:15, Paul called Jesus “*Lord*,” an indication that something had already occurred in the heart of Paul to recognize Jesus as Lord. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:3,

*“No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.”*

Along with that, Paul was already praying in Acts 9:11 and Ananias called Paul “*brother*” in Acts 9:17, both indications of one already saved. It is also stated Paul was called to preach (Acts 26:16) and called to the foreign mission field (Acts 26:17,18) by the time of Ananias’ visit and three days before he was baptized. All these evidences point to a salvation experience prior to Paul’s baptism. Quoting again the Greek scholar A. T. Robertson:

“It is possible, as in 2:38, to take these words as teaching baptismal remission or salvation by means of baptism, but to do so is in my opinion a complete subversion of Paul’s vivid and picturesque language. As in Romans 6:4-6 where baptism is the picture of death, burial and resurrection, so here baptism pictures the change that had already taken place when Paul surrendered to Jesus on the way (verse 10). Baptism here pictures the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ.” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*; vol. 3 pg. 361]

**“HAVING PREVIOUSLY” CALLED UPON THE LORD** — Several commentaries make note of the importance of the Greek in Ananias’ statement. When Ananias tells Paul to “*arise, be baptized, wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord*,” the tense of the last command is literally “*having called*” (aorist middle participle).

“Calling on [ἐπικαλησάμενος – epikalēsamenos] — ‘having (that is, *after* having) called on,’ referring the confession of Christ which *preceded* baptism.” [Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary*, vol. 3 pg. 160; italics his]

Kenneth Wuest picks up on this Greek nuance and translates the verse as follows:

*“And now, why are you delaying? Having arisen, be baptized and wash away your sins, having previously called upon His Name.”* (Acts 22:16, *Wuest’s Expanded NT*)

I realize this alone does not remove all difficulties from the verse, but it does add another indication that Paul was indeed saved prior to his visit to Ananias and his baptism. Paul beyond any doubt had already “*called upon the name of the Lord*” according to Acts 22:16. Connect that with what Paul teaches in Romans:

*“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ... for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Romans 10:9,13)

This would lend credence to the fact that Paul was already saved and Ananias was without doubt speaking symbolically when he said “*be baptized and wash away your sins.*”

**SINS ARE “WASHED” IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST** — Since Paul used the phrase “*wash away your sins*” as part of his testimony, it would be good to see what the rest of the New Testament says about “*washing away your sins.*” This will again show Ananias was using baptism in a symbolic fashion. We may easily prove our sins are forgiven because of the death of Christ on the cross; or in other words, we are “*washed in the blood of the Lamb.*”

*“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” (Revelation 1:5)*

*“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.” (Revelation 7:14)*

*“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.” (1 John 1:7)*

*“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18,19)*

*“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22)*

*“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7)*

*“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13,14)*

*“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:24,25)*

*“Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” (Romans 5:9,10)*

*“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9)*

*“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28)*

*“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Hebrews 9:11,12)*

*“And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:27,28)*

Therefore to take Paul’s statement in Acts 22:16 as anything more than a metaphor is to confuse the symbolic rite with what the rite represents. Dr. B. H. Carroll agrees, making this statement:

“The points here are: (1) Paul is commanded to wash away his sins; (2) to wash them away in being baptized. Two simple questions will unveil the meaning: (a) Can a man himself really wash away his sins? (b) Can water on the outside really wash away sins on the inside? The two are answered by the Scripture: ‘God alone can forgive sins,’ and when we come to the real remission it must come from God. Again: ‘The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.’ Therefore ... when it says that he was commanded to wash away his sins in baptism, it is evident that it is not a real cleansing from sin that is contemplated, for the Scriptures so abundantly teach that the blood of Jesus Christ alone really cleanses from sin. ***Then what does it mean? That Paul in baptism might symbolically wash away his sins. What God himself accomplished through the sacrifice of his Son, Paul might show forth in a symbolic cleansing, just as what Christ’s blood accomplishes in the remission of sins, the wine of the Lord’s Supper may symbolically accomplish.***” [Carroll, *Interpretation of the English Bible*; vol. 5, pg. 93f; bold / italic emphasis mine]

## ***romans 6:3 ...***

*“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin.” (Romans 6:1-7)*

**“CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT ...”** — One pastor has been quoted as stating the three most important things of any verse are “*context, context and context.*” Everything we have seen up to this point in this book confirms that pastor as being correct.

Each of these verses alone, pulled out and brought together, gives great weight to what we are proving to be a false teaching. But taking each verse in its appropriate setting, considering the context and Scripture as a whole puts an entirely different light on the teaching that baptism is required for salvation. This is further evidenced in this passage.

The greatest argument against Romans 6:1-7 teaching baptismal regeneration is the context in which we find the verses. Paul begins Romans chapter six by asking,

*“Should we continue in sin once we are saved? God forbid!”*

Paul then reminds his readers that as Christians we are “*dead to sin,*” something declared to be true by our baptism. Paul is again using symbolic language, using baptism as an illustration or a reminder of our professed spiritual position. “*Should we continue in sin as Christians? God forbid! Didn’t you profess to be dead to the world, the flesh and the devil when you were baptized? Doesn’t your baptism teach we are dead to our old way of life? Shouldn’t we as Christians therefore walk in a new way by virtue of our new life in Christ? ...*”. ***Paul is not here instructing the unsaved how to be saved; Paul is speaking to believers about how to live as believers.***

What follows is evidence to support my conclusions.

**ROMANS IN A NUTSHELL** — Romans is widely considered the most logical and well-constructed book in the New Testament. Paul had a specific goal in mind when he wrote Romans and without question followed that purpose through to the end of the letter. With that understanding, let us look at Paul’s

train-of-thought leading up to our controversial verses:

- In Romans chapter one Paul shows the heathen world is lost without Christ: *“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.”* (Romans 1:22,23)
- In chapter two he addresses the Jewish religious world to show they too are lost without Christ: *“Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?”* (Romans 2:21,22)
- He brings his thoughts on sin to a conclusion in chapter three: *“... for there is no difference [between the heathen or the religious]: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:22b,23)
- Paul’s purpose in doing this was to show that all mankind, Jew or Gentile, religious or pagan, is under the condemnation of sin. Therefore anyone’s only hope is through faith in the finished work of Christ: *“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* (Romans 3:21-25a, 28) So the only hope for anyone is faith in the sacrificial death of Christ on the behalf of sinful man. All mankind: boy or girl, man or woman, Jew or Gentile ... there is no difference!
- Paul then continues his discussion on salvation in chapter four, teaching all our sins are imputed (credited) to Christ’s account and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to our account when we trust Jesus as Savior: *“Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”* (Romans 4:7,8)
- Chapter five continues the salvation teaching by comparing Jesus with Adam, that as Adam represented all mankind in the garden when he fell, so did Christ represent all those who would one day belong to Him: *“For if by one man’s offense 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.”* (Romans 5:17)

So we see in Romans chapters one through three Paul shows all mankind to be sinners, then continues in Romans chapters three through five to show how sinful men may be saved from the penalty of their sins. This salvation is clearly by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

**SALVATION THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE** — Since the theme of Romans chapters three through five is salvation, it is instructive to see what Paul says about this salvation. Note how many times in these chapters Paul speaks of faith:

*“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe...”* (Romans 3:22a)

*“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...”* (Romans 3:25a)

*“the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus....” (Romans 3:26b)*

*“therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law....” (Romans 3:28)*

*“seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith....” (Romans 3:30)*

*“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness....” (Romans 4:3b)*

*“but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness....” (Romans 4:5)*

*“for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness....” (Romans 4:9b)*

*“righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe....” (Romans 4:11b)*

*“who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham....” (Romans 4:12b)*

*“through the righteousness of faith....” (Romans 4:13c)*

*“therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace....” (Romans 4:16)*

*“but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead....” (Romans 4:24)*

*“therefore being justified by faith....” (Romans 5:1a)*

*“by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand....” (Romans 5:2a)*

**Not once is baptism mentioned throughout these chapters speaking directly of salvation!** Yet, having declared a person is saved through faith in Christ, Paul begins to teach on sanctification and only then when speaking of sanctification does he use baptism as an illustration.

Therefore considering the context, here is an interesting question for those who believe Romans 6:1-7 teaches that baptism saves: *If baptism is required for salvation, why was it not mentioned even one time in the previous chapters?* If Paul intended Romans 6:1-7 to teach that baptism is required for salvation, the burden of proof is upon those who teach baptismal regeneration.

**BAPTIZED UNTO CHRIST** — There are parallels between Romans 6:1-7 with 1 Corinthians 10:2 when the Jews were “*baptized unto Moses*” as they crossed the Red Sea:

*“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (1 Corinthians 10:1,2)*

The same Greek wording is used here to state believers are “*baptized unto Christ’s death*.” Therefore understanding Paul’s meaning in first Corinthians chapter ten will help us better understand his statements in Romans chapter six.

While Paul may have been drawing parallels to the Israelites' experience and our modern baptism, the Israelites were obviously not baptized in the sense of going forward in a church setting and being immersed in a pool of water. In fact just the opposite is true; Scripture makes it plain the Hebrews left walking on dry ground (Exodus 14:16). What was Paul's purpose therefore in referencing baptism in pictorial fashion?

The Jewish slaves recently rescued from Egypt were said to be "*baptized unto Moses*" as they passed through the Red Sea. This *baptism* was one of identification, uniting the Jews to their leader Moses. Simon Kistemaker makes this observation concerning Paul's language:

"For the Israelites, being 'baptized into Moses' signified that they were members of the covenant which God had made with his people (Exod. 24:4b-8). Moses served as mediator of that first covenant, which became obsolete, but Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:15)... The experiences of being 'under the cloud' and 'passing through the sea' both related to the *identification* of the children of Israel as a people now separated from Egypt, and under God's protection.... As the passage through the Red Sea symbolized an end to Israel's slavery and its beginning as a new nation, so baptism for the Christian means a separation from sin and consecration to God." [Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*; pg. 323; italics his]

Relating this then back to Romans 6:1-7, what did Paul mean when he spoke of the believer being baptized *into* or *unto* Jesus Christ? Just as the passage through the water and the cloud identified the nation of Israel with their leader Moses, so does baptism identify the believer with their leader Jesus Christ. This is Paul's point in Romans 6:1-7, not that somehow there are mystical powers in the baptismal waters to place the believer into the kingdom of God. Allow me to quote several authorities on this teaching:

"The metaphor of baptism is clearly used in a relational sense elsewhere, as in the case of the Israelites baptized into Moses by reason of the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:2). ***They became united to him as never before, recognizing his leadership and their dependence on him. Union with Christ means union with him in his death.... Paul uses baptism to illustrate this vital union with Christ in his death (v. 4), though baptism does not accomplish it.*** Apparently, he pictures burial with Christ, however momentarily, in the submergence of the body under the baptismal waters. The importance of burial is that it attests the reality of death (1 Cor 15:3,4). It expresses with finality the end of the old life governed by relationship with Adam. It also expresses the impossibility of a new life apart from divine action. The God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead has likewise imparted life to those who are his." [Harrison, *Romans*; bold / italic emphasis mine]

"The word *baptized* is to be taken in its technical sense: *to be baptized with water* (by the fact of the passage through the sea and under the cloud), and the clause must consequently signify: *in relation to Moses*, as a typical Saviour — that is to say, in order to having part in the divine deliverance of which Moses was the agent." [Godet, *Romans*, pg 239; italics his]

"βαπτίζειν εἰς (baptizein eis) always means *to baptize in reference to*. When it is said that the Hebrews were baptized *unto* Moses, 1 Corinthians 10:2; or when the apostle asks the Corinthians, 'Were ye baptized unto the name of Paul?' 1 Corinthians 1:13; or when we are said to be baptized unto Christ, the meaning is, they were baptized in reference to Moses, Paul, or Christ; i.e., to be brought into union with them, as their disciples, or worshipers, as the case may be." [Hodge, *Romans*; pg. 193; italics his]

Lest someone read too much into our statements of the Jews being *united* unto Moses and believers being

*identified* with Christ in their baptism, let it be remembered the Jews were already God's people prior to their Red Sea experience. What was the Old Testament covenant seal? It was circumcision, given to Abraham after he had already become a believer (Genesis 15:6; 17:10-14). Referring specifically then to the Red Sea experience, we see that before the Passover could be taken one of the Lord's stipulations was the partakers must be circumcised (Exodus 12:43-48). That this was done is clear from Joshua 5:5a:

*"Now all the people that came out were circumcised..."*

Therefore the Jews were set apart and united with the Lord prior to their "*baptism*" in the Red Sea.

Applying the picture used here by Paul to our baptismal regeneration question, anyone being baptized must already belong to Christ through faith. Baptism only illustrates outwardly what has taken place inwardly.

**WE ONLY BURY DEAD PEOPLE** — Since baptism pictures what has happened to the believer spiritually, it is important we look at what is actually being portrayed.

One of the purposes of baptism is to illustrate the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is accepted by all theologians that immerse and is a prominent point in Romans 6:1-7. What is being pictured therefore are these truths:

- the person stands in the baptismal pool (*portraying Christ on the cross, dying for sins*)
- the person is immersed into the waters of the baptismal pool (*portraying Christ being buried*)
- the person is brought forth from the waters of the baptismal pool (*portraying Christ's resurrection*)

While setting forth the gospel in pictorial fashion, the same things are also being testified as having happened spiritually to the believer. In symbolic fashion baptism is also making this statement: "*I profess to have died to my sins with them being nailed to the cross, my sins are buried with Christ and I have risen to new life in Christ.*" Let us look at baptism in that sense:

- the person stands in the baptismal pool (*portraying that person dying to the world, the flesh and the devil in Christ*)
- the person is immersed into the waters of the baptismal pool (*portraying our sins being buried with Christ*)
- the person is brought forth from the waters of the baptismal pool (*portraying the believer as being raised to a newness of life, joining in the resurrection of Christ*)

But what does baptismal regeneration portray? For one to accept baptismal regeneration, this is the symbol:

- the person stands in the baptismal pool alive to sin and in his sins
- the person is immersed into the waters of the baptismal pool while still in his sins, at which time the person dies in the baptismal waters
- the person is brought forth from the waters of the baptismal pool, raised to new life

It can be seen therefore those teaching baptismal regeneration are destroying the scriptural picture

represented in baptism. *In essence what baptism portrays to those accepting baptismal regeneration is that we are not saved by the death of Christ but we are rather saved by His burial!* The entire picture of baptism is destroyed. While not trying to be silly, it should be pointed out we do not bury people to kill them, we bury people because they are already dead! Frederic L. Godet makes the same point during his comments on Romans chapter six:

“St. Paul means: ‘*Ye know not that ye are dead...?* Well, then, ye are ignorant that as many of you as there are, are men interred (baptized)! People do not bury the living.’ ... But if baptism is in his view the external proof of death, as burial is the proof of decease, he can take up again the course of his argument and say: ‘In consequence of this death to sin undergone in Christ, we have therefore been buried with Him ... in order also to rise with him,’ which signifies: ‘buried with Him, not with the aim of remaining in the tomb or of issuing from it to return to the past life, but to penetrate into a new life, whence a return to the old is definitely precluded.’ ... Burial is the act which consummates the breaking of the last tie between man and his earthly life. This was likewise the meaning of our Lord’s entombment. Similarly by baptism there is publically consummated the believer’s breaking with the life of the present world, and with his own natural life.” [Godet, *Romans*, pg 238ff; italics his]

One accepting baptismal regeneration might reject this as a minor point. If so, let us ask ourselves several questions: how does Paul present baptism in Romans chapter six? If Paul was not teaching baptism portrays the death, burial and resurrection of both Christ and the believer, what was he saying here? And if baptismal regeneration is true, why would Paul use baptism as an illustration in Romans chapter six in the manner he did? These are not minor questions and require adequate answers by those accepting baptismal regeneration.

The very act of baptism pictures the one being baptized as already dead to sin prior to baptism. Any other teaching perverts the meaning of baptism.

**PAUL’S PURPOSE FOR MENTIONING BAPTISM** — Having seen what Paul was *not* saying when he talked about baptism in Romans 6:1-7, it is also proper to evaluate why Paul *did* mention baptism at this time.

Paul had shown all mankind under the condemnation of sin (chapters one through three). He then continued to show the only answer to our sin question was the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf, received by faith through the grace of God (chapters three through five). Paul then begins chapter six with a question: “*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*” Paul is addressing this question: If we have been saved by grace and freely forgiven, is it then a license to sin?

Paul was shocked by such a consideration. “*Shall we continue in sin? ...Let it not be!*” which is in the Greek, μη γένοιτο (mē genoito), the strongest form of denial possible in the Greek language. There is nothing Paul could have said to more strongly emphasize how incorrect is that thinking!

To illustrate the foolishness of such thinking, Paul reminds his readers of their profession made when baptized. *In baptism, they declared themselves to be dead unto the world, the flesh and the devil, and alive unto Christ, therefore how could they continue living under the dominion of sin?* It is that thought Paul will expound throughout the rest of chapter six.

So why did Paul mention baptism? Paul obviously did not believe baptism was required for salvation; he had just spent three chapters teaching salvation is not of works but by faith in Christ Jesus. But since we are

now believers, as one professing to have died to the world, the flesh and the devil, and risen to new life in Christ (as testified by our baptism), we should live up to our profession! This is Paul's reason for using the illustration of baptism, not to somehow repudiate what he has already taught.

## *galatians 3:27 ...*

*“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:26,27)*

**BAPTIZED UNTO CHRIST** — We have just seen in Romans how Paul used baptism to illustrate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. While speaking of baptism, Paul used these words:

*“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3)*

Was Paul teaching in the book of Romans that baptism was required for our salvation? No, we looked at the abundant evidence to prove Paul was not teaching baptismal regeneration in that passage.

Now as we come to the book of Galatians we see Paul using the same terminology:

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

The connection between this Galatians verse and the passage in Romans is the phrase *“baptized into Christ.”* As in Acts 2:38, the word for *into* is our word *eis*, used here again in the sense of *“in respect to, with reference to, with a view towards, in connection with, in the light of.”* Young’s Literal translation states it this way:

*“For ye are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus, for as many as to Christ were baptized did put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:26,27; Young’s Literal Translation)*

Since we have already discussed the sense of being *“baptized into Christ,”* we will just review some of the comments made in our last section:

Just as the passage through the water and the cloud identified the nation of Israel with their leader Moses, so does baptism identify the believer with their leader Jesus Christ. This is what Paul means in Romans 6:1-7, not that somehow there are mystical powers in the baptismal waters to place the believer into the kingdom of God.... “βαπτίζειν εις (baptizein eis) always means *to baptize in reference to*. When it is said that the Hebrews were baptized *unto* Moses, 1 Corinthians 10:2; or when the apostle asks the Corinthians, “Were ye baptized unto the name of Paul?” 1 Corinthians 1:13; or when we are said to be baptized unto Christ, the meaning is, they were baptized in reference to Moses, Paul, or Christ; i.e., to be brought into union with them, as their disciples, or worshipers, as the case may be.” [Hodge, *Romans*; pg. 193; italics his]

As in Romans and First Corinthians, being *“baptized unto Christ”* has nothing to do with one’s eternal destiny. This phrase is not being used in the sense of being saved from our sins. Rather it is a phrase of identification, symbolizing outwardly what took place inwardly at the moment of salvation. Uniformly

throughout the New Testament, baptism has to do with our sanctification and growth in Christ, not our justification (salvation from our sins).

**SALVATION BY FAITH IN GALATIANS** — Another item to consider is Paul's emphasis upon faith in the matter of salvation. Confining ourselves to the book of Galatians, we discover these statements of salvation by faith alone:

*"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."* (Galatians 2:16)

*"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (Galatians 3:2)

*"He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (Galatians 3:5)

*"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."* (Galatians 3:6)

*"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."* (Galatians 3:7)

*"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."* (Galatians 3:8)

*"So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."* (Galatians 3:9)

*"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."* (Galatians 3:11)

*"That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."* (Galatians 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."* (Galatians 3:22)

*"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* (Galatians 3:24)

*"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:26)

*"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* (Galatians 5:6)

Considering the letter to the Galatians is a fairly short letter, it is amazing how many times salvation by faith alone is mentioned in this writing. It is even more amazing when one looks at the above verses and notes eleven out of the thirteen verses are in the same chapter as our controversial verse. This greatly argues against Galatians 3:27 as teaching baptismal regeneration.

**THE OVERALL CONTEXT OF GALATIANS ARGUES AGAINST BAPTISMAL REGENERATION** — That Paul is not speaking of baptismal regeneration in this verse is clear from his entire argument of the book of Galatians.

The reason for Paul writing Galatians was that Judaizers had been following Paul, attempting to destroy the work he had done. The difference between Paul's teachings and the teachings of the Judaizers was one of the believer's relationship to the law of Moses. After Paul would preach the gospel of salvation through faith in the risen Son of God, the Judaizers would come and teach salvation was not complete without circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic law. For Paul to teach here that baptism is required would go against all he has been teaching of the grace of God in salvation.

If baptism was required for salvation, Paul would have written an entirely different book. Instead of arguing against the Judaizers because they believed circumcision was necessary for salvation, Paul would have used their argument to prove baptism now was required, not circumcision, for salvation. His entire writing would have been different! Somewhere in Galatians would have been some statement similar to this: "*O foolish Galatians. Do you not know circumcision has been replaced with baptism. It is with baptism we are saved, not circumcision.*" But nowhere does Paul use any such argument.

**THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND "PUTTING ON" CHRIST** — As we look now at the immediate context in which our controversial verse is found, we will see this too adds to the argument that Paul was not teaching baptismal regeneration.

Our present context begins in chapter three verse fifteen and goes through the end of the chapter. Paul had just stated we are saved after the similitude of Abraham who "*believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*" (Galatians 3:6) But the Judaizers were basing their salvation upon the law of Moses. Abraham lived around 2000 BC and the law was given to Moses about 1450 BC, five hundred and fifty years later. Did the law supercede Abraham's covenant? Was the Abrahamic covenant changed?

To answer that, Paul begins with a common example from everyday life (Galatians 3:15a). Even in our human cultures, once a covenant has been agreed upon, no one except the original authors of the covenant has the authority to change that covenant (Galatians 3:15b-16). Therefore the law could never modify the covenant made between Abraham and the Lord (Galatians 3:17).

But what if the later revelation such as the law of Moses was greater than the previous covenant? Would the law then take priority? Paul addresses that question by stating the law was not greater than the promise given to Abraham (the word *promise* is used eight times in this short section). The promise given to Abraham contained no "*ifs*", it was an unconditional covenant given by grace. But the Mosaic law was given through a mediator on a temporary basis (Galatians 3:18-20). The law was an *addition*, given until the Seed had come (Galatians 3:19). This Seed of the promise was Jesus Christ, therefore in Christ the purpose of the law had been fulfilled.

Was the law therefore opposed to the promise given by God? (Galatians 3:21) No, the law does not *contradict* the promise but rather *cooperates* with the purpose and will of God. The law was never given to impart life (Galatians 3:21) but rather was given to reveal sin (Galatians 3:24).

To explain this, Paul uses an illustration which was readily familiar to his readers: the child guardian (παιδαγωγός — *paidagōgos*, from the Greek words *pais* = a boy, a child, and *agō* = to lead).

“In many Roman and Greek households, well-educated slaves took the children to and from school

and watched over them during the day. Sometimes they would teach the children, sometimes they would protect and prohibit, and sometimes they would even discipline. This is what Paul means by *schoolmaster* (Gal. 3:24); but please do not read into this word our modern idea of a schoolteacher. The transliteration of the Greek word would give us our word pedagogue, which literally means ‘a child conductor.’ ” [Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*; vol. 1 pg. 703; italics his]

Several lessons may be deduced from Paul’s illustration. The first is this: the pedagogue was not the child’s father although he did act as guardian and disciplinarian between the ages of typically six to sixteen. The law likewise did not impart life but was rather given to regulate life. Secondly, the work of the pedagogue was to guide the child to maturity. After the youth had come of age, the pedagogue was no longer needed. Likewise the law was temporarily given to prepare Israel for the coming of the Promised Seed, Jesus. One could say this was the national or historical purpose of the law. But the law also had a personal application: it was given to reveal the fact we are sinners in need of a Savior (Galatians 3:24). Once saved, we no longer need the law as our *schoolmaster*, our *pedagogue* (Galatians 3:25).

Coming now to our controversial verse, Paul continues by explaining the law could never do what Christ has done. It is through faith in Christ that the Lord accepts us as His children (Galatians 3:26). Being now children of God through faith in Christ, we identify ourselves with Him in our baptism and are said to “*put on*” Christ (Galatians 3:27). ***Baptism is therefore an identification with Christ, a public declaration of our discipleship. As an army uniform does not make a soldier but declares the wearer to be one, so in Biblical language we “put on Christ,” the intent being to let ourselves be known as His people.***

To clarify, it is not that we are saved by the merits of our baptism. The fact we are saved by faith is stated over and over again by Paul in this portion of Scripture. Even in the statement immediately preceding our controversial verse Paul says,

“*for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*” (Galatians 3:26)

But the believer expresses that faith outwardly in his baptism, identifying himself with the risen Savior. It was inconceivable in the New Testament for one to come to faith in Christ and yet not be baptized. Does that mean baptism is required to go to heaven? No, but it does mean one saved will express their inward faith by outward obedience, with one of the first acts of obedience being their baptism.

“Just as a garment which one puts on quite envelopes the person wearing it, and identifies his appearance and his life, so the person baptized in Christ is quite entirely taken up in Christ and in the salvation brought by Him. That still leaves the question how the apostle establishes this relationship between being baptized and putting on Christ. We are not to take this in a magical or automatic sense. Baptism, too, is not in that sense an independent moment in the economy of salvation, as though oneness with Christ should take place for the believers only at baptism. Elsewhere Paul speaks of this oneness as the fruit solely of faith, without mention of baptism (cf. 2:19ff.). What happens at baptism is a confirmation and sealing, a visible manifestation of what is given to the church by faith. So much is true, however, that Paul wants to indicate by his objective-sacramental mode of expression, and by appealing especially to baptism for establishing the sonship of the believers, that the reality of becoming one with Christ is nowhere so clearly

revealed or so firmly founded in the Christian consciousness of faith, as precisely in this baptism (cf. Rom 6:3ff, and Col 2:12ff).” [Ridderbos, *Epistle to the Churches of Galatia*; pg. 148]

Why the reference to “*putting on Christ*?” Continuing Paul’s illustration, the child under the supervision of the pedagogue would change garments when he came of age. Under the supervision of a pedagogue, the child wore the clothing of his childhood called *toga praetexta*. When he grew into adulthood and no longer needed the pedagogue, he would set aside the garments of his youth and wear the *toga virilis*. This new toga demonstrated he was now an adult citizen.

“Greeks and Romans made much of this occasion and celebrated the investment of a youth with man’s dress by family gatherings and religious rites. The youth, hitherto subject to domestic rule, was then admitted to the rights and responsibilities of a citizen, and took his place beside his father in the councils of the family. Baptism is in fact likened to a spiritual coming of age: the convert, who had hitherto been bound to obey definite commandments and fulfil definite duties, was now set free to learn God’s will from the inward voice of the Spirit, and discharge the heavier obligations incumbent on a citizen of the heavenly commonwealth under the guidance of an enlightened conscience. He had entered on his spiritual manhood, and was accordingly emancipated from his earlier bondage to an outward law.” [Rendall, *Galatians*; vol. 3, pg. 174]

In like manner, one belonging to Christ is no longer under the pedagogue, meaning they are not under the tutelage of the law. Rather they are a full-grown son of God with adult status. Therefore (to continue the argument against the Judaizers), why would they want to go back under the law as their pedagogue?

This is important. ***The “putting on Christ” is not part of our salvation but rather is a part of our Christian growth, our sanctification.*** To use Paul’s illustration: did the changing of the robes of the child under the pedagogue make the child an adult? Was it the robes that brought about the change of status? No, the child had come to age and the ceremony was held to declare the child was now an adult with full responsibility and privileges. The changing of the robes had nothing to do with that change of status. But as a public symbol of that change of status, the child-adult was given the *toga virilis* to indicate his new status.

Likewise, baptism makes no spiritual change in and of itself. But after one has trusted Christ, after one has been saved by the grace of God, that spiritual change is publically declared by the act of baptism. It is in baptism the believer *puts on Christ* (his “*toga*” is changed) and he declares himself a follower of the Lord.

This is true of all believers, regardless of race (“*Jew or Greek*”), social status (“*slave or free*”) and gender (“*male or female*”) (Galatians 3:28). The ground is level at the foot of the cross. All those believing in Christ Jesus have the same relationship to our heavenly Father according to the promise (Galatians 3:29). That does not mean our race, social status or gender changes at the moment of our salvation. But in regards to our standing before God, none of those things matter. The promise given to Abraham is given to all who believe.

**WHY DOES PAUL MENTION BAPTISM AT THIS POINT?** — Those who teach baptismal regeneration might at this point ask, “*If baptism is not required for salvation, why did Paul even bring it up at all?*” That would be a legitimate question and one which was touched upon above as we discussed the immediate context:

*“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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."* (Galatians 3:26-29)

Paul in this passage makes reference to all believers as being children of God by virtue of their salvation in Christ Jesus through faith (Galatians 3:26). When he mentions baptism in verse twenty-seven, Paul was continuing his reference to those children of God in a manner which fits into his analogy given earlier (Galatians 3:27). *This is important: baptism is not a major point of Paul's in this verse; rather it is merely a casual reference only.* Continuing his main point, Paul states that all believers are accepted in Christ without distinction according to the promises given to Abraham. In essence, Paul is stating the following: *"You are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for in putting on the toga virilis (baptism) you have all given public testimony to your relationship with Christ, whatever your earthly status: Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. There are no such distinctions in Christ, according to the promises given to Abraham."*

While baptism does identify the believer with his Lord (the "*toga virilis*"), it also demonstrates an equality not found in the world and is therefore useful to lead into Paul's next point. Are the Jews baptized differently than the Gentiles? Is there a baptism for the rich and a different baptism for the poor? Do men and women differ in how they are baptized? No, as in Christ there is no distinction in people's relationship to their Lord, likewise there is only one form of baptism for all.

"In Paul's day fratricidal class-distinctions were the order of the day, just as they are still in many quarters.... For the present purpose it is necessary only to note that the Jews drew a sharp line of separation between themselves and the 'swarms' or 'hordes' of outsiders, heathen nations in contrast to Israel. Often such heathen were simply called 'dogs.' Even proselytes to the Jewish religion were never fully 'accepted.' After all, they were not 'children of Abraham.' It seems that the Judaizers of Paul's day had not broken away from this feeling of disdain for non-Jews. Gentiles, too, were often guilty of similar snobbery. They looked down upon the Jews as much as the latter looked down upon them. And as to their attitude toward slaves, it cannot have been far removed from that of Aristotle, who called a slave 'an animated implement,' a mere breathing tool. And as to the distinction between male and female, even such a man of culture as Josephus, in the passage in his work *Against Apion* be genuine, declared, 'The woman, so says the law, is inferior in all things to man.' What Paul is saying, then, is that all such distinctions — be they racial-religious ('neither Jew nor Greek'), social ('neither slave nor freeman'), or sexual ('no male and female') — must be thoroughly and forever abandoned, since in Christ all are equal." [Hendriksen, *Galatians*; pg. 149f; italics his]

## *colossians 2:12 ...*

*“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 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”*  
(Colossians 2:10-13)

**BURIED WITH CHRIST IN BAPTISM** — The language used here again reminds us of our Romans passage. Paul wrote to the church at Rome in chapter six the following:

*“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* (Romans 6:4)

Those who teach baptismal regeneration pick up on the same phrase here to teach baptism is required to go to heaven: *“buried with him in baptism.”*

Having covered Romans chapter six in a previous section, there are not many new comments on this controversial verse. We saw in the Roman’s section that being *buried with Christ in baptism* had nothing to do with salvation but rather was an act of identification. Those principles learned in that passage applies here as well. In regards to our Colossians verse, we will consider one single point which confirms Paul was not referring to baptismal regeneration.

*“We ought to read the phrase ‘Buried with him by reason of the [or, His] baptism unto death’ in the sense of experiencing, or being initiated into, His death (cf. Luke 12:50 – ‘I have a baptism to be baptized with’; see also Mark 10:38, 39). Everything in this verse, therefore, is clear in its consistency, and beautiful in its depth of meaning and power of expression if we but recognize the subject of it as our symbolic identification with Christ. This is clearly for the high purpose of a close spiritual union with Him, even to participation by faith in His very death and burial.”* [Thomas, *Colossians*; pg. 84f]

**THE CONTEXT ARGUES AGAINST BAPTISMAL REGENERATION** — Paul’s purpose in writing this portion of Scripture was to defend the truth against the false teachings of the Gnostics and Judaizers. These groups were teaching that one could be a partaker in the *pleroma* (fullness) of God by observing rituals. Paul argues against that teaching, showing that in Christ is the fullness of the Godhead in personal form (Colossians 2:9). When anyone places their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, they are united to Him in a spiritual union and therefore are already a partaker of the divine nature and *pleroma* (Colossians 2:10).

While not directly spelled out, we are able to determine the arguments of the false teachers by how Paul responds to them in this letter:

“In verses 1-10 the warning against the Colossian Heresy was couched in general terms. With verse 11, however, right in the middle of the sentence, it begins to assume specific form. We now learn that the error that was being propagated at Colosse was basically of a Judaistic character. For a reason not definitely stated but which we can probably infer from the context and from similar warnings in other epistles the teachers of false doctrine were advertising such things as circumcision, rigid adherence [sic] to dietary restrictions, and strict observance of festivals and sabbaths.” [Hendriksen, *Colossians*; pg. 113f]

Paul will later address the other issues of the observing of days (Colossians 2:16,17) and ascetic practices (Colossians 2:18,19). This however strays from our purpose concerning baptismal regeneration. We will direct our thoughts solely to Paul’s comments concerning baptism and how Paul used circumcision in relation to the baptism question.

From history and from Paul’s comments, we know one of the false teachings here was that circumcision was necessary to be accepted by God. Paul counters this attack by stating believers have already been circumcised spiritually, of which the Jewish ritual was a type (Colossians 2:11; see below on how Paul used this term). This should not have been news to the Judaizers; even in the Old Testament the importance of circumcision was inward:

*“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.”* (Deuteronomy 10:16)

*“And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.”* (Deuteronomy 30:6)

*“For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.”* (Jeremiah 4:4,5)

*“To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.”* (Jeremiah 6:10)

*“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”* (Jeremiah 9:25,26)

*“And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant*

*because of all your abominations. And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves. Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.” (Ezekiel 44:6-9)*

Therefore we see while physical circumcision was commanded, the Lord always intended it to be an outward picture of what took place in the hearts of the believers (both of Old Testament and New Testament believers). Paul summed it up this way:

*“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Romans 2:28,29)*

Paul is not here stating the physical act of circumcision had no purpose. But we should not allow the physical act to have priority over what it was supposed to represent.

Having proved circumcision was unnecessary for both salvation or a *higher spiritual plane*, Paul moves to a second example: baptism. Baptism was a more general illustration to teach the same principles. Circumcision was uniquely an Old Testament ritual, it was centered upon the Jewish people or converts to Judaism, and of course it was confined to males. Baptism is more universal in its application: it was for the New Testament era, it was for both Jews and Gentiles, and it was for all believers regardless of gender.

*“This word gives Paul’s vivid picture of baptism as a symbolic burial with Christ and resurrection also to newness of life in him as Paul shows by the addition ‘wherein ye were also raised with him.’ ... In the symbol of baptism the resurrection to new life in Christ is pictured with an allusion to Christ’s own resurrection and to our final resurrection. **Paul does not mean to say that the new life in Christ is caused or created by the act of baptism. That is grossly to misunderstand him. The Gnostics and the Judaizers were sacramentalists, but not so Paul the champion of spiritual Christianity. He has just given the spiritual interpretation to circumcision which itself followed Abraham’s faith (Romans 4:10-12). Cf. Galatians 3:27. Baptism gives a picture of the change already wrought in the heart ‘through faith.’** “ [Robertson, *Word Pictures*; vol. 4 pg. 492f; emphasis mine]*

*“The meaning, then, of Col. 2:11,12 would seem to be as follows (in summary): **‘You, believers, have no need of external circumcision. You have received a far better circumcision, that of heart and life. That circumcision is yours by virtue of your union with Christ. When he was buried you — that is, your former, wicked selves — were buried with him. When he was raised you — as new creatures — were raised with him. In the experience of baptism you received the sign and seal of this marvelous Spirit-wrought transformation.’** “ [Hendriksen, *Colossians*; pg. 115f; emphasis mine]*

We can see Paul was using both circumcision and baptism to teach against either of those rites as being necessary for salvation or to achieve a *higher spiritual plane* to God. To teach baptismal regeneration from these verses is to go directly against all of what Paul was trying to teach.

**SPIRITUALLY OR SYMBOLICALLY?** — Prior to moving on, we should take note of how Paul uses both circumcision and baptism in this passage. The reason for this observation is there are commentators who teach Paul was speaking of a *spiritual baptism* which is said to occur at salvation. I find that an unnecessary application of Paul’s words. I believe Paul to be speaking of literal, physical circumcision and

baptism, both in a symbolic sense to explain a spiritual truth.

Circumcision was given to Abraham by God as a sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:9-14). This outward sign was not to take the place of the inward reality but as explained above, the outward sign was only a symbol of what took place in the heart when one puts their trust in the God of Abraham.

Through the centuries however Judaism had come to regard the symbol as the reality. The faith of the common Jew at the time of Christ was one of lineage: if one was born a Jew and maintained the Jewish rituals (including circumcision) then one was to be included into the blessings of Abraham. This is what John the Baptist was attacking when he preached,

*“And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”* (Matthew 3:9)

Jesus made the same argument when He responded to the Pharisees in this manner:

*“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”* (John 8:39)

The Pharisees thought they were accepted due to their physical lineage while Christ made the application spiritually.

To clarify: admitting there is a spiritual truth symbolized by circumcision is not the same as a “*spiritual circumcision*.” Paul was speaking symbolically when he wrote Colossians 2:11,12, the sense being as follows:

*Think of your circumcision. One of the reasons for that sign was to teach there was a problem with our physical heritage. Circumcision involved the cutting away of the flesh from the reproductive member. This was not because the reproductive act itself was sinful but rather because the product of our reproduction was a sinful human being. The problem was a corrupt seed, meaning our sinful nature inherited from Adam transmitted through natural generation. Circumcision symbolized the removing of the flesh from the seed. In like manner, when one puts their faith in Christ who is the fulness of the Godhead in bodily form (Colossians 2:9,10), it is like we are spiritually cut off from our sinful nature and given new life in Christ. This is part of what circumcision should have always pictured.*

*In like manner baptism by immersion portrays the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:12). This too symbolizes what takes place spiritually when one puts their faith in Christ. We are spiritually slain, placed in the grave and then given the resurrected life of Christ. Baptism itself does not do this; but just as circumcision was an outward sign of an inward reality, so is baptism an outward sign of an inward reality. At salvation one is crucified with Christ, buried and raised again to live anew in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:12,13).*

How this fits into the context of the Colossian error has already been commented upon. For now, the point I want to make is ***the circumcision and baptism spoken of by Paul were the literal circumcision and baptism with which we are all familiar. But using those common rites, Paul takes the truths contained within those rituals and makes the spiritual application of what happens at the moment of salvation.*** In

both instances there is the picture of a separation from the flesh and a new life is provided. It is unnecessary therefore to interpret circumcision and baptism as “*spiritual circumcision*” or “*spiritual baptism*” to understand Paul’s point.

## *1 peter 3:20,21 ...*

*“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 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.” (1 Peter 3:18-22)*

**DIFFICULT PASSAGE** — Every commentary or person I have ever consulted on First Peter 3:13-22 spoke of how difficult this portion of Scripture is, with many interpretations abounding concerning several issues. Most of those issues are not a matter of *“Bible believers vs. those who reject the Bible;”* rather, good men who each accept the authority of the Scriptures differ on several issues throughout this section. Some of those difficulties concern our controversial verse.

Perhaps as well as any other portion of Scripture therefore this verse illustrates a principle of Bible interpretation I have adapted through the years. My response to any difficult passage is to place everyone’s explanation into one of three categories:

- (1) that which is clearly error,
- (2) that with which I may not agree but which does not violate accepted doctrinal truth, and
- (3) that which I believe to be closest to explaining the passage.

Using this passage as illustration, I would place the baptismal regeneration explanation into category number one, that which is error (the reasons for making such a placement will be explained below). But since this passage contains an element of mystery as to Peter’s precise intent, there are several other interpretations which explain the passage and do not violate other passages doctrinally. Of those explanations, there is one interpretation which seems to most satisfy my understanding of the passage and therefore is the explanation I would place into category number three. The others which differ slightly yet contain no doctrinal error I would place into category number two. This allows me to be gracious to those who disagree in minor issues while still maintaining doctrinal standards.

Let us look now as to what Peter was trying to tell his readers.

**OUR SALVATION IS BASED UPON THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, NOT BAPTISM** — In

all of my studies without exception, commentators and Bible translations alike consider a portion of the controversial verse as parenthetical. The verse itself reads as follows:

*“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.”*

Let us begin by looking at the verse without the parenthetical portion:

*“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

Peter has mentioned the resurrection several times already, the first instance being in verse three of chapter one, where he connects the new birth with the resurrection of Christ:

*“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.”* (1 Peter 1:3)

The next instance is in the immediate context of our verse in question:

*“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 by the Spirit.”* (1 Peter 3:18)

The third instance is in our verse. Peter states our salvation is “by” (or “through”) the resurrection of Christ. Regardless of how we interpret the parenthetical clause, this is important: ***our salvation rests in an objective reality, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on our behalf.*** Baptism may picture that death and resurrection, but the saving powers of our soul are not to be found in the picture but in the objective reality itself. This in and of itself argues against the baptismal regeneration interpretation.

**THE PARENTHETICAL CLAUSE** — Turning now to the parenthetical clause:

*“not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.”*

Those who believe Peter is teaching baptismal regeneration accepts this clause as emphasizing the importance of baptism and that it should not be taken lightly. The explanation of these verses becomes this: *“baptism regenerates our soul and is therefore not to be thought of as any other external act which merely cleanses our flesh.”* While not impossible, this is at best an improbable interpretation, is not demanded, and as we consider the actual word meanings contained within the clause, there is sufficient evidence not to interpret it in this manner.

**IS ‘FILTH OF THE FLESH’ LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE?** — As we look at the parenthetical clause, one of the first questions we come across is whether the “*filth of the flesh*” spoken of by Peter is literal or figurative. Obviously for the baptismal regeneration interpretation to be correct, “*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh*” would be taken literally to mean “*not washing away the dirt from our physical body.*”

In favor of a literal interpretation is the fact Peter uses the word “*flesh*” several times in his epistle, each time literally. In chapter one verse twenty-four Peter quotes Isaiah:

*“For all flesh is as grass ... ”.*

In chapter three verse eighteen:

*“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 by the Spirit.”*

Then following our controversial verse, Peter uses the word four other times:

*“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; 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.... For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (1 Peter 4:1,2,6)*

In addition to that, the word “*filth*” is used only here in the New Testament and has its roots in classical Greek to signify “*especially dry dirt, as on the person.*” [Vincent, *Word Studies*; vol. 1 pg. 658] Therefore there is adequate justification to accept this literally.

But one may accept this literally and still reject the baptismal regeneration interpretation. Some Bible scholars see a connection between Peter’s comments with those of the author of Hebrews. The Jews too had ceremonial washings, a point of contention even with Christ Himself during His earthly ministry (Matthew 15:1-6; Mark 7:1-6; Luke 11:37-39). The Hebrews’ passage is particularly interesting because like Peter, the author of Hebrews speaks of ceremonial washings in relation to the conscience:

*“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; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 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?” (Heb 9:9-14)*

The author of Hebrews states these external washings which were part of the Jewish ceremonial law were unable to clear the conscience of the worshiper, but Christ provided salvation including the cleansing of our conscience by the offering of Himself on our behalf. Peter may have been making a similar point in his parenthetical clause. This verse may then be interpreted as follows: “*not merely as an external cleansing which was so familiar to the Jews but rather an answer of a good conscience.*”

Another way in which we may understand the parenthetical clause is in a metaphoric sense. If it is a metaphor, then “*the filth of the flesh*” would refer to the sins of our depraved nature.

In favor of this interpretation is the usage of the words *filth* and *flesh* throughout the Scripture. While Vincent is technically correct when he commented above about the word *filth* only being used once, forms of the same word are used in three other places. In James 2:2 a form of the same word is used literally,

*“... and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment.”*

But in James 1:21 the word is figuratively:

*“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

Kenneth Wuest translates the phrase as follows:

*“Wherefore, having put away every moral uncleanness...” (James 1:21, *Wuest’s Expanded NT*)*

A form of the same word is also used twice in Revelation 22:11,

*“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”*

The interpretation here is obviously figurative.

So *filth* might be interpreted literally as *dry dirt* or figuratively as *moral defilement*. That the word *flesh* is often used to refer to our sinful natures is accepted by all Bible students. Therefore *filth of the flesh* could easily be understood either literally or symbolically and still make good sense.

But if Peter was speaking symbolically then it is impossible for these verses to refer to baptismal regeneration. The meaning of the verse would therefore be as follows: *“baptism delivers our conscience before God by our obedience to His command to be baptized, but that act of obedience does not have anything to do with the putting away of the sins of our sinful nature.”* If this interpretation is correct then Peter was directly attacking the baptismal regeneration teaching. Many good commentators follow that interpretation.

Which interpretation is correct? As in Acts 2:38, it is impossible from the phrase *“filth of the flesh”* alone to know for certain which way to interpret Peter’s statement. Those who teach baptismal regeneration will interpret the verse in a manner which supports their conclusions while those who reject baptismal regeneration will interpret in a manner to support their conclusions. For our study up to this point, it is important to note the differences but realize we must consider other evidences if we want to determine exactly what Peter meant.

**THE ANSWER OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE** — One of the key factors in determining Peter’s intent here is what Peter says is an *“answer of a good conscience.”*

To understand this phrase, we must look in detail at the word translated in the KJV as *“answer.”* The Greek word is  $\square\pi\epsilon\rho\acute{o}\tau\eta\mu\alpha$  (eperōtēma) and is only used here in the New Testament. The root word however is used fifty-nine times and is almost always translated *“ask.”* Other translations have the following: *“an appeal”* (NASB, RSV) and *“pledge”* (NIV). Kenneth Wuest translates the phrase as follows:

*“...but the witness of a good conscience toward God.” (1 Peter 3:21, *Wuest’s Expanded NT*)*

Most commentators believe there is some connection between this word and the questions asked by the administrator of baptism to the baptismal candidate. But there are differences of opinion concerning the exact emphasis of this word, whether it is upon the interrogations at the baptism or upon the response to those interrogations. Regardless of the emphasis, the difference between the two definitions is a minor issue and has no significant impact on our study.

I realize some of the following quotes are technical but this word is so interesting, I thought it helpful to give further background as to how this word was used. Warren Wiersbe explains the word in this manner:

“The word *answer* in 1 Peter 3:21 is a legal term meaning ‘a pledge, a demand.’ When a person was signing a contract, he would be asked, ‘Do you pledge to obey and fulfill the terms of this contract?’ His answer had to be, ‘Yes, I do,’ or he could not sign. When converts were prepared for baptism, they would be asked if they intended to obey God and serve Him, and to break with their sinful past. If they had reservations in their hearts, or deliberately lied, they would not have a good conscience if, under pressure of persecution, they denied the Lord. (Peter knew something about that!) So, Peter reminded them of their baptismal testimony to encourage them to be true to Christ.” [Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*; vol. 2 pg. 417f; italics his]

A. T. Robertson is a little more dogmatic, leaning heavily towards the sense of the interrogation only:

“ ‘*But the interrogation of a good conscience toward God*’.... In ancient Greek it never means answer, but only inquiry. The inscriptions of the age of the Antonines use it of the Senate’s approval after inquiry. That may be the sense here, that is, avowal of consecration to God after inquiry, having repented and turned to God and now making this public proclamation of that fact by means of baptism (the symbol of the previous inward change of heart).” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 6 pg. 120; italics his]

John Gill, a theologian from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is more open and recognizes both aspects of the definition as a possibility:

“[T]he Vulgate Latin renders it, *the interrogation of a good conscience*; referring, it may be, to the interrogations that used to be put to those who desired baptism; as dost thou renounce Satan? Dost thou believe in Christ? See Acts 8:36,37; others render it, *the stipulation of a good conscience*; alluding also to the ancient custom of obliging those that were baptized to covenant and agree to live a holy life and conversation, to renounce the devil and all his works, and the pomps and vanities of this world: and baptism does certainly lay an obligation on men to walk in newness of life; see Rom. 6:4,5; the Ethiopic version renders it, *confession of God*: and to this the Syriac version agrees, rendering it, *confessing God with a pure conscience*; for, to baptism, profession of faith in Christ, and of the doctrine of Christ in a pure conscience, is requisite: and in baptism persons make a public confession of God, and openly put on Christ before men: the sense seems plainly this; that when baptism is rightly performed, and its end answered, when a person, conscious to himself of its being an ordinance of Christ, and of his duty to submit to it, does do so upon profession of his faith in Christ, in obedience to his command, and *with* a view to his glory; in doing which he discharges a good conscience towards God.” [Gill, *Commentary*; vol. 6 pg. 835f; italics his]

**THE SUMMATION OF THE VERSE** — This is all important to our discussion. By combining *conscience* with what we have learned above concerning *answer*, Peter’s meaning could have been either (1) the responses given by the candidate, valid only if given in a clear conscience, meaning in their heart what they are professing with their lips; or (2) a pledge towards the Lord as testified in their baptism that the candidate will live with good conscience towards God; or rather, that in response to the conviction upon their conscience, they pledge to live as unto the Lord.

In either case however we see the emphasis is not upon baptism but rather upon the *answer* given by the

baptismal candidate *if* given from a pure conscience. Peter Davids does a fine job bringing together everything we have learned about these verses:

“But that raises the question as to *how* baptism saves. Peter clarifies carefully, although his thought is so compressed that it is hard for us at this distance to decipher. Still, we can see that he makes two points. First, while baptism does consist in a washing in water, it is not this outward washing (‘the removal of dirt from the body’) that is salvific. The water does not have a magical quality; neither does the outward ritual. Second, baptism saves through a pledge or ‘answer to God’ from a ‘good conscience.’ The first term is the more critical, but unfortunately appears only here in the NT. Two translations are possible. The one relates it closely to its verbal root and argues that it means ‘request’ and therefore ‘the request of a good conscience from God.’ Baptism is therefore a call to God for purification (cf. Heb. 10:22). The other points to uses of the term for oracle or decision (Sir. 33:3; Dan 4:17 in Theodotion) and its second-century use for ‘pledge’ or a formal answer to questions placed by another. In this case baptism is a response to God in answer to questions placed by the baptizer (e.g., ‘Do you commit yourself to follow Christ?’). That this latter is more probable appears in that some Jews also made pledges at their initiation into a community (e.g., in the Dead Sea Scrolls 1QS 1-2; 5:8-10), that this is the way the Fathers understood the passage, that the NT gives hints of such questioning (Acts 8:37; 1 Tim 6:12), and that this fits the expected thrust of the passage (i.e., not the outward washing, but the inward pledge). If this interpretation is true, then *the salvific aspect of baptism arises from the pledge of oneself to God as a response to questions formally asked at baptism. But this answer must be given from a good conscience. A half-hearted or partial commitment will not do, although it might fool people. It is the purity of the heart toward God that is important. This pledge, even in its most sincere form, however, would not be efficacious without the external objective means of salvation to grasp onto, that is, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” [Davids, *First Peter*; pg. 144f; italics his; bold / italics emphasis mine]

**OTHER SALVATION REFERENCES IN FIRST PETER** — Since the verse we are studying is admittedly difficult to interpret, it will be good to get further support of Peter’s teachings from the rest of his epistle. Consider the following:

- In the first chapter, salvation is mentioned in several manners: we are elect and set-apart unto Christ through the Spirit (v2); begotten through the resurrection of Christ (v3); preserved through faith (v5, 9); salvation is through the grace of God (v10; which contradicts any works on our part; cp. Romans 11:6); and we are born again by the application of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit (v22, 23). Nothing in the first chapter indicates any need for an external ritual being necessary for salvation.
- As mentioned above while discussing Acts 2:38, it is in this epistle that Peter makes the following statement: “*Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:18,19). Peter clearly states our salvation does not rest on any ritual “*received by tradition from our fathers.*” Peter would not turn around two chapters later and state we must be baptized to go to heaven!
- Peter states our salvation rests upon Christ through faith: “*Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him*

*shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious” (1 Peter 2:6,7) No mention here of baptism as a requirement.*

**BAPTISM AS AN ANTI-TYPE OF THE FLOOD** — The Greek word here for *like figure* is *anti-type*, a corresponding figure of salvation of which Noah’s flood is the type. The flood spoke of judgment to those who rejected the preaching of Noah but salvation to those within the ark. While not perfect in every detail, the flood teaches the following in regards to baptism:

- *the means of salvation is also the means of judgment* — In the flood Noah and his family were saved through the waters but others without perished. By embracing Christ in faith and submitting to His rule in our lives, beginning with the command of baptism, we by our obedience cast judgment upon those who disobey. The same Lord Christ is the foundational rock which saves those who believe and likewise crushes those who reject Him. “*Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner.... and whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*” (Matthew 21:42,44)
- *the ark was God’s ordinance, being built as commanded and directed by the Lord* — so is baptism not a human invention but rather given by the Lord to His churches (Matthew 21:23-27).
- *those within the ark died to the old and left the ark to enter a new life with God* — In like manner the redeemed have died to our sins and raised spiritually to new life in Christ, again pictured in baptism.
- *Noah himself is a picture of believers* — Noah was saved by grace (Genesis 6:8) through faith (Hebrews 11:7); he was in the ark (Genesis 7:1), saved, safe and shut-up in the ark before a drop of water fell (Genesis 7:10,16). Believers today are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), are in Christ (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17), saved, safe and shut-up in God’s hands before we are baptized (Colossians 3:4; John 10:28).
- *the water itself does not save, either in Noah’s day or today’s baptism* — The water in Noah’s day stayed out of the ark, lifting it forth and declaring the message of Noah true and those inside the ark righteous. The same is true of baptism: it shows forth one as righteous by declaration only, not actually by making any righteous. Ironically it may be noted what happened to those in the waters of Noah’s flood: *they perished!* In like manner those who go through the baptismal waters without any real spiritual saving experience of faith in Christ, trusting in their baptism to take them to heaven, *will likewise perish!*

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?** — Admitting great difficulties with any interpretation of this passage by anyone, the sense appears to be as follows:

- Since the immediate context is that of encouragement for the suffering believers, Peter brings to remembrance those who have suffered in the past. As the great majority in the days of the flood persecuted the minority, God delivered the faithful few through water to a new life and destroyed the ungodly. In like manner, God will deliver the faithful few in Peter’s day, those who have symbolically been delivered through the waters of baptism while destroying those who reject the

message of salvation.

- This deliverance only comes to those who with a pure heart have believed in the death and resurrection of Christ, giving evidence thereby while questioned during the baptismal ritual by the administrator of baptism.
- The baptism ritual itself is not to be thought of as having the powers to save in and of itself since all it is possible to do is externally wash away filth. It is the heart's response to the Lord that is important rather than the external act alone.
- The objective basis for the believer's salvation is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

## ***matthew 3:11 ...***

*“Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto 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: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:5-12)*

## ***mark 1:4 ...***

*“John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Mark 1:4,5)*

## ***luke 3:3 ...***

*“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”*

**PARALLEL VERSES** — I will consider these verses together under one section since they are all parallel verses. Matthew, Mark and Luke are recording the preaching of John the Baptist. The controversial wording as Matthew gives it is as follows:

*“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance.”*

Mark comments on John the Baptist in the following manner:

*“John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”*

Luke follows Mark:

*“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”*

**THE PREPOSITION ‘EIS’** — As we attempt to understand exactly what John the Baptist was saying in these verses, we again find ourselves confronted with the Greek preposition εἰς (*eis*). We discussed this preposition in the first section of this book, discovering it was important in our evaluation of Acts 2:38. We also discovered while evaluating Acts 2:38 that the word *eis* may be understood in a variety of ways and that it was impossible to understand that verse simply by reading the verse alone. We then went on to prove Acts 2:38 could not be teaching baptismal regeneration because of all the evidence both within and without the verse.

We find ourselves in the same situation here. To evaluate these verses therefore, we will first prove John the Baptist was not teaching his hearers had to be baptized to go to heaven. After showing what John the Baptist was *not* saying, we will finish with a few comments as to what he *was* saying.

**JOHN THE BAPTIST DEMANDED PROOF OF SALVATION PRIOR TO BAPTIZING HIS HEARERS** — Our controversial verse in Matthew is chapter three verse eleven, *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance.”* Let us back up a little in the story to see how our verse fits in the context.

We find John baptizing many who came to him, all of whom confessed their sins (without doubt this included the intention of turning from these confessed sins):

*“Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”* (Matthew 3:5,6)

What a wonderful sight that must have been to see hundreds of those listening to this preacher come forth in repentance to get their life right with God. But then Matthew records another group of people who came to hear John preach. This group’s motives were different. They were not touched spiritually by his preaching; rather, they came out of curiosity to check on this itinerant preacher. John recognized this and confronted these men:

*“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”* (Matthew 3:7-10)

What was John saying? He told this group of curious busy-bodies to *“bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance,”* or in other words, he told them to repent from their sins and show forth that repentance with a change life (the *“fruits of repentance”*). He also told them to not rely upon their heritage, that they were *“children of Abraham.”* As discussed above in the Colossians 2:12 section, it was common for the Jews at that time to believe they were accepted by God simply due to the fact they were Jews, children of Abraham and keepers of the covenant. John the Baptist said no, there was no physical heritage linkage which placed them in the kingdom of God. This kingdom was a spiritual kingdom and salvation was personal and inward, not outward and physical. John then finished with a warning of the imminent judgement of God.

The important part of these verses in relation to our discussion is the fact ***John would not just baptize anyone. Whoever came forth to be baptized by John had to come with a repentant heart.*** The baptism was

therefore not a baptism “*to produce repentance*” but rather a baptism because they *had already* repented. When John had doubt of that fact, he demanded evidence that repentance had already taken place. This then explains the “*baptism unto repentance.*”

As far as Mark’s and Luke’s comments “*for the remission of sins*” we have the same situation. The preposition used here is again *eis* and may be understood in various manners. Is there reason to believe Mark was not teaching baptismal regeneration? The answer is yes, there is evidence of how we may understand this phrase.

We have just shown John the Baptist would not baptize anyone who had not already repented of their sins. But as stated in other places in this book, it is impossible to truly repent without truly believing. And by definition, salvation from our sins is when one turns from their sins (repentance) and places their trust in Christ alone for salvation (faith):

Theologians have long considered the act of repentance and faith as a single, inseparable act. By that the theologians mean it is impossible to truly repent without having saving faith, and it is also impossible to have true saving faith without repentance. Therefore repentance and faith are as two sides of a coin, each impossible to have without the other. [from Acts 2:38 section]

The gospel therefore is for sinners to repent and place their trust in the Savior who died for sinners. Or, stated in another manner, “*repent for the remission of your sins.*” We do not ordinarily use those terms when presenting the gospel in our culture, but that it is the message of the gospel is evident in the Great Commission as recorded by Luke:

“*And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*” (Luke 24:47)

Therefore John the Baptist would not baptize anyone unless they had already been saved; or in other words, they had repented and placed their faith in Christ. Granted, at the time of John’s baptism, much of this was not clearly understood for the Messiah had not yet come. But regardless of the terminology, the same basic elements take place in everyone’s salvation. Whether that be Abraham, David or Moses hundreds and thousands of years before the Messiah, or that it be you or I thousands of years after the Messiah came. We may have the benefit of the complete Scriptures, and we may have a much better understanding of the act of redemption; but the salvation process is the same from Adam until the last sinner saved. Everyone in heaven will have gotten there by turning from their sins and placing their trust in the One who died for them. There is no other way.

**BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE** — How are we to understand these verses then? John A. Broadus in his commentary on Matthew makes the following comments:

“Others take it to mean generally, ‘with reference to repentance’ (so Tyndale, ‘in token of’). Such a meaning the preposition with its case does somewhat frequently have, and that gives here a very good sense (as it would also in Luke 2:3; Mark 1:4, ‘unto remission of sins’).” [Broadus, *Matthew*; pg. 49f]

He adds the following comments in a footnote:

“See *eis*, translated *concerning*, Acts 2:25, and such phrases as ‘to jeer at a man *eis* his rags’ (Aristoph.), ‘to reproach *eis* friendship’ (Xen.), ‘to differ from one *eis* virtue (Plat.)” [Broadus, *Matthew*; pg. 49 footnote, italics his]

Others make the same observations:

“*Preached the baptism of repentance (kēlussōn baptisma metanoias)*. Heralded a repentance kind of baptism (genitive case, genus case), a baptism marked by repentance.... He called upon the Jews to change their minds and to turn from their sins, ‘confessing their sins’ (*exomologoumenoi tas hamartias autōn*).” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 1 pg. 252; italics his]

“[A]nd this he did *unto repentance*, or *at*, or *upon repentance*; for so εἰς may be rendered, as it is in Matt. xii. 41, for the meaning is not that John baptized them, in order to bring them to repentance; since he required repentance and fruits meet for it, previous to baptism; but that he had baptized them upon the foot of their repentance; and so the learned Grotius observes, that the phrase may be very aptly explained thus: ‘I baptize you upon the “profession of repentance ye make.’ ” [Gill, *Commentary*; vol. 4 pg. 20; italics his]

We can see therefore this verse may easily be understood to not *produce* repentance but rather the baptism takes place *because of* repentance. Here are how some have translated the verse:

“*I baptise you in water in token of repentance*” (Matthew 3:11a; *Tyndale 1534 NT*)

“*As for myself, I indeed immerse you in water because of repentance.*” (Matthew 3:11; *Wuest’s Expanded NT*)

“*I am baptizing you in water to picture your repentance [that is, to picture your turning from sin to a new life].*” (Matthew 3:11; *William’s NT*)

**FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS** — Turning now to Mark’s and Luke’s passages we find it possible to take “*for the remission of sins*” in a variety of ways. Some comments by others:

“*Unto remission of sins (eis aphasis hamartiōn)*. This is a difficult phrase to translate accurately. Certainly John did not mean that the baptism was the means of obtaining the forgiveness of their sins or necessary to the remission of sins. The trouble lies in the use of *eis* which sometimes is used when purpose is expressed, but sometimes when there is no such idea as in Matt. 10:41 and 12:41. ***Probably ‘with reference to’ is as good a translation here as is possible. The baptism was on the basis of the repentance and confession of sin and, as Paul later explained (Rom. 6:4), was a picture of the death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ.*** This symbol was already in use by the Jews for proselytes who became Jews. John is treating the Jewish nation as pagans who need to repent, to confess their sins, and to come back to the kingdom of God. The baptism in the Jordan was the objective challenge to the people.” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 1 pg. 252f; italics his; bold/italic emphasis mine]

“Baptism is here called, the *baptism of repentance*; because John required repentance antecedent to it, and administered it upon profession of repentance, and as an open testification of it; and this *for* or *unto the remission of sins*: not for the obtaining the remission of sins, as if either repentance, or baptism, were the causes of pardon of sin, but the sense is, that John preached that men should repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, who was to come; and upon their repentance and faith, be baptized; in which ordinance, they might be led to a fresh view of the free and full forgiveness of

their sins, through Christ; whose blood was shed for many, to obtain it; see Acts ii. 38.” [Gill, *Commentary*; vol. 5, pg. 307; italics his]

*“For the remission of sins. — Or, toward the remission — εις αφεσιν. They were to repent, and be baptized in reference to the remission of sins.”* [Clarke, *Commentary on CD ROM*; vol. 5 pg. 599; italics his]

This may therefore be translated as follows:

*“John the baptizer appeared in the desert and was preaching a baptism conditioned on repentance to obtain the forgiveness of sins.”* (Mark 1:4; *William’s NT*)

*“There came upon the human scene, John the Baptizer, in the uninhabited region, making a public proclamation with that formality, gravity, and authority which must be heeded and obeyed, of a baptism which had to do with a change of mind relative to the previous life an individual lived, this baptism being in view of the fact that sins are put away.”* (Mark 1:4; *Wuest’s Expanded NT*)

As in Acts 2:38, I believe the statement concerning John the Baptist was as follows: *“John preached baptism because of the remission of sins.”*

## *john 3:5 ...*

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 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. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:3-10)*

**GRATUITOUS BIBLE INTERPRETATION** — We are all familiar with movies which include certain scenes which has nothing to do with the story itself. These scenes are typically things which are done to entice certain audiences to attend and, knowing Hollywood, typically these scenes are vulgar in one way or another. Those types of scenes are called “gratuitous” for the simple reason that they are not part of the original story line but are interjected for ulterior reasons.

The final three verses to be discussed are like our example for the following reason: *baptism is not even mentioned in these verses nor in their context!* For one to read baptism into these verses is entirely gratuitous. This is not to imply vulgarity as in our Hollywood example. Rather when we say baptism is read into the verses gratuitously, we mean that neither the verse itself nor the immediate context has anything to do with baptism. These next three verses speak of “*born of water and Spirit,*” “*washing of regeneration*” and “*washing of water.*” Because of the use of “*water*” or “*washing,*” some take that to mean John and Paul were speaking of being baptized in water. The rendering is therefore *gratuitous* since baptism is read into the verse rather than being there naturally.

Let us look at each of these verses and see why they do not refer to baptismal regeneration.

**JESUS ATTEMPTS TO CLARIFY A SPIRITUAL TRUTH** — As we consider the first of these verses, John 3:5, it will help to give some context background.

Jesus had been speaking to a large crowd throughout the day. Many wanted to follow Him but for the wrong reasons. Jesus, knowing the hearts of all men, refused to commit Himself to any of them since their motives were wrong (John 2:23-25).

But later that same night a man came to Jesus who apparently had some true heart-felt questions. This man’s name is familiar to even the younger Sunday School children: Nicodemus. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council, a Pharisee, and undoubtedly came at night for anonymity’s sake (John 3:1,2). Jesus came straight to the heart of the matter and told Nicodemus he had to be “*born again*” (John 3:3). Confused,

Nicodemus asked how anyone could be “*born again*,” as if anyone could enter his mother’s womb a second time to be born physically! (John 3:4) It is then Jesus spoke our controversial verse:

*“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:5)

It is Jesus’ use of “*water and the Spirit*” which some understand to mean baptism.

Before going into the different explanations as to what Jesus was talking about, it is important to keep this in mind: ***Jesus was attempting to clarify a spiritual truth. When Jesus first mentioned the new birth, Nicodemus questioned what that meant. So however Jesus responded, He was speaking in such a manner to help this Pharisee Nicodemus understand what the new birth was.*** Whatever our explanation of John 3:5, it must fit into that context.

**THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT ARGUES AGAINST BAPTISMAL REGENERATION** — As mentioned throughout this book, the context each of these verses are found in is of utmost importance. It is this context which has typically shown the baptismal regeneration interpretation to be false. This verse in John chapter three is no exception.

Those teaching baptismal regeneration state the “*water*” here is a reference to water baptism; therefore, “*Except a man is born again by the work of the Holy Spirit through the waters of baptism, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” But continuing His discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus says the following:

*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* (John 3:6)

The first reference is obviously our natural, physical birth, “*that which is born of the flesh is flesh.*” If Jesus was specifically trying to teach baptism is required to go to heaven, would He not then have completed His statement by saying, “*that which is born of water and the Spirit is Spirit?*”

Jesus further says,

*“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.”* (John 3:8)

Again, if baptism were a requirement for heaven, would not Jesus have said “*so is everyone born of water and the Spirit*” or “*so is everyone born of the Spirit through the means of baptismal waters?*” Therefore even in the immediate context alone there is reason to believe the new birth is purely a spiritual act and not one requiring baptism.

**THE MYSTERIOUS WORKING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** — Another item worth noting in the immediate context is Jesus’ comments concerning the mystery of the new birth:

*“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.”* (John 3:8)

Jesus made a comparison between the working of the Holy Spirit and the wind. The wind is invisible but powerful. It blows where it wants and while we can see the effect of the wind by the rustling of the leaves and the sound produced by the wind, we cannot see the wind itself. So is everyone born of the Spirit: He

works invisibly and we cannot see His work, yet we can see the effects of His work in the lives of which the Holy Spirit effectually works.

Let us take Jesus' comment and place that in the context of baptismal regeneration. If someone is born again when baptized, the baptism itself is planned and organized. Where is the mystery? Where is the invisible working, unknown to those around them until we see the evidence? In order for this to be teaching baptismal regeneration, Jesus' illustration might have best been altered to read as follows:

*“The wind bloweth when and where we desire, it is planned and scheduled for special times of service when we are gathered around the baptismal pool, and not only can we hear the sound thereof but we even have control of where it is coming from and where it will go; so is everyone born again through the waters of baptism.”*

Compare that with what happens during a preaching service. The pews are filled with those listening for a message from God. The man of God is in the pulpit. Prayer has been made, the message prepared, and now the delivery. Some sit throughout the service unaffected, perhaps looking around or briefly glancing at their watches, wondering when it will end. But a few are listening intently. The pastor seems to be speaking directly to them. Every word pierces into their very soul. An argument arises within their thoughts which convince them the speaker is foolish, but about that time their unspoken diversion is responded to by the pastor. How did he know what I was thinking? Where does this man derive his authority? And so it goes until at the end the person yields, confesses himself a sinner before God, guilty and vile, unable to save himself. Perhaps with tears the sinner embraces the Christ of the cross in his heart, knowing for certain his only hope rests upon the work of his risen Savior. In all probability the sinner steps forward to speak to the pastor, acknowledging his guilt and asking what must be done for salvation. As the Scripture is opened, the sinner's guilt is relieved and the joy of salvation is evident. This is the sovereign working of the Spirit; not only during times of services but at home or at work, wherever it so pleases the Spirit to reveal Himself to the sinner.

Which of these two scenarios picture an invisible Spirit working behind the scenes in a mysterious manner, one we are ignorant of but one which produces evidence of the Spirit's working? Obviously the baptismal regeneration scenario does not fit the comments made by Jesus to Nicodemus. But the Holy Spirit working invisibly, silently in the hearts of men and women, producing conviction of sin and the faith which relieves that conviction ... it is that scenario which more closely resembles what Jesus describes to Nicodemus.

The illustration Jesus used to Nicodemus is one of a sinner responding to Christ through faith alone, not water baptism. Again, even in the immediate context of John 3:5 there is evidence the “*water*” referred to by Jesus was not the waters of baptism.

**BAPTISM IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN** — How often and in what manner baptism is spoken of throughout the Gospel of John is instructive. Baptism itself is only mentioned in three passages in the entire Gospel:

- John 1:19-34 where John is introduced, being questioned by the Pharisees as to why he was baptizing. Included here is the baptism of Jesus when John makes his famous confession, “*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*” (John 1:29)
- John 3:22 – 4:2 where both Jesus' disciples and John's disciples are baptizing, but John's congregation is decreasing as they leave John to go to Jesus. John says this is proper, “*He must increase, but I must decrease.*” (John 3:30)

- The last reference is John 10:40 where baptism is mentioned only in passing, *“And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode.”* (John 10:40).

This is important to note: not only is baptism not given a prominent place in John’s gospel, but even when it is mentioned nothing is said of any powers therein relating to our salvation.

In the passage when we first meet John the Baptist, the Pharisees ask,

*“Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”* (John 1:25)

What a perfect occasion to describe how it is through the waters of baptism that the Holy Spirit will give the new birth! But rather than mention anything about salvation, John the Baptist uses the question to introduce Jesus to the crowd and Jewish leaders. As mentioned above,

*“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29)

**THE PRIORITY OF FAITH ALONE IN JOHN’S GOSPEL** — Taking a verse in this gospel and attempting to use it to prove works for salvation or baptism for salvation is a little like a story I once heard. A man had a raggedy old dog, all chewed up and very much damaged. It had a proud walk but that did not hide the fact it also limped badly. Its body was covered with bruises and scars. One man made the comment, *“Your dog can’t fight very well, can he?”* To which the owner replied, *“Oh, my dog’s a fine fighter. He’s just not a good judge on who to pick on.”*

When one comes to the book of John and picks a fight with the gospel, he has come to the wrong place.

As we look at the entire book of John we find the emphasis on faith alone for our salvation. The evidence for this fact is overwhelming:

*“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”* (John 1:12)

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou?”* (John 1:50)

*“...that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:15)

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16)

*“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.”* (John 3:18)

*“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.”* (John 3:36)

*“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman.”* (John 4:39)

*“...and many more believed because of his own word”* (John 4:41)

*“Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is*

*indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (John 4:42)*

*“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.” (John 5:24)*

*“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:29)*

*“What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee?” (John 6:30)*

*“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)*

*“... but I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not” (John 6:36)*

*“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)*

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

*“But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.” (John 6:64)*

*“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:69)*

*“... for neither did his brethren believe in him.” (John 7:5)*

*“... and many of the people believed on him” (John 7:31)*

*“... he that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38)*

*“Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7:48)*

*“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24)*

*“As he spake these words, many believed on him.” (John 8:30)*

*“... then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him” (John 8:31)*

*“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35)*

*“He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” (John 9:36)*

*“And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.” (John 9:38)*

*“Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.” (John 10:25)*

*“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.” (John 10:26)*

*“... and many believed on him there.” (John 10:42)*

*“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25)*

*“... and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:26)*

*“She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:27)*

*“... that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 11:42)*

*“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” (John 11:45)*

*“if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him” (John 11:48)*

*“... because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.” (John 12:11)*

*“While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.” (John 12:36)*

*“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him” (John 12:37)*

*“... that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:38)*

*“Therefore they could not believe” (John 12:39)*

*“... nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him” (John 12:42)*

*“He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.” (John 12:44)*

*“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” (John 12:46)*

*“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not” (John 12:47)*

*“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?” (John 14:10)*

*“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.” (John 14:11)*

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me” (John 14:12)*

*“... and they have believed that thou didst send me.” (John 17:8)*

*“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)*

*“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.” (John 20:31)*

***Considering John’s emphasis on faith in the matter of salvation, as well as the number of times faith itself is mentioned in the Gospel of John without any mention of baptism, it is ludicrous to take a single obscure, controversial verse and teach baptism is required for salvation.***

**MULTIPLE EXPLANATIONS** — It is evident therefore Jesus was not referring to baptismal regeneration while speaking to Nicodemus. The question arises therefore: what did Jesus mean when He

spoke of “*water and the Spirit?*”

There is much difference of opinion in answering that question. As stated above in the First Peter 3:21 section, I categorize these opinions into three categories. The first category I would reject as error and in that category I would place the teaching of baptismal regeneration. The last category I would place what I believe to be the closest to explaining the facts within the context. I will save that explanation for last. But in the second category are the teachings of a variety of men, not false teachers but good men disagreeing. I would not part fellowship over any of the following explanations, nor could I even argue wholeheartedly against some of the following. Here are differing explanations to explain Jesus’ terminology:

- *water refers to baptism* in symbolic fashion only. “Being baptized with water is not sufficient. The *sign* is valuable, indeed. It is of great importance both as a pictorial representation and as a seal. But *the sign should be accompanied by the thing signified*: the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. It is the latter that is absolutely necessary if one is to be saved.” [Hendriksen, *John*; pg. 134, italics his] While not impossible, I think this unlikely simply due to the fact I cannot believe Nicodemus would have immediately thought of John the Baptist’s work when Jesus said “*water and spirit.*” Again, I think it important we remember Jesus was speaking to the Jewish Pharisee Nicodemus and used the terms to explain something spiritual. I cannot see Jesus bringing up a difficult statement while trying to clarify.
- *water refers to natural birth*. Since children in the womb are enclosed in a sac of water, some believe the reference is merely to our physical birth. I have never understood this explanation. At first token it appears to be saying, “*The only people who may be born again are those who are born.*” What other kind of people are there? I find this unnecessarily redundant.
- *water refers to spiritual birth*. This may be foreign to our culture but quite acceptable to first century Jews: “Words referring to something wet were often used as euphemisms for the male semen: ‘water, dew, drop, rain’ and other words were all used in this way.... In the Greek text, ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’ go closely together in this passage (there is one ‘of’ that covers them both). Some have thought accordingly that the birth in question is one of water-and-Spirit, that is, a birth of ‘spiritual seed’; one must be born with the birth the Holy Spirit provides. It is a support to this view that a little later Jesus speaks of being born ‘of the Spirit’ (v8); and it is John’s habit to use expressions that differ from one another slightly but have essentially the same meaning.... Jesus would then be saying that the way into the kingdom is the way of divine action. We enter a completely new existence by virtue of what the Holy Spirit does in us.” [Morris, *John*; pg. 90f] This would not be an impossible interpretation.
- *water refers to the Holy Spirit*. “The Greek word *kai*, meaning ‘and,’ is sometimes used with the meaning of ‘even.’ Thus John 3:5 could read, ‘Except one be born of water, even the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’ This translation is permissible since water is sometimes a type of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39). Dr. J. R. Mantey of Chicago endorses this view; so also does Markus Barth. Barth says that ‘water and Spirit’ is an example of typical Johannine theology which often uses two words or expressions by ways of copulation in order to bring out one unique and supreme thought. Examples are: testifying and seeing (John 3:11); Spirit and truth (4:23); signs and wonders (4:48); hearing and believing (5:24); seeing and believing (6:30); hearing and learning (6:45); believing and being sure (6:69); resurrection and life (11:25).” [Anderson, *Baptism*; pg. 128] Again, this would not be an impossible interpretation.

- *water refers to the word of God.* In support of this are passages which describe the word of God as cleansing us: “now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3), “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” (Ephesians 5:25,26), “of His own will begat us by the word of truth” (James 1:18) and “being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). That the word of God is used in regeneration is beyond doubt and is a potential explanation. The only thing I would like to suggest however is we are thinking of the verse in light of New Testament passages which were not written when Jesus and Nicodemus talked. Would Nicodemus have thought of the Word of God when Jesus was talking to Him? Possibly he would have since the Word of God is just as critical in Old Testament thinking as in the New Testament; but it still seems to depend heavily on verses not written when Christ was talking to Nicodemus. Again: what is important is Nicodemus’ understanding of what Jesus said, not what our understanding is after we have the complete New Testament and two thousand years of theology behind us. What would have gone through the mind of Nicodemus?

- *water refers to symbolic cleansing.* That this symbolic cleansing was part of the Old Testament is beyond contradiction. As will be explained below by Dr. B. H. Carroll, this is something Nicodemus should have been aware of which explains Jesus’ rebuke.

In trying to place myself in the context, I would imagine the correlation between these washings and its symbolism would be readily recognized by a teacher of the law. Jesus therefore, speaking to an unsaved Jewish Pharisee, would be speaking in a manner which Nicodemus would have understood. Jesus would naturally have used these Old Testament truths to illustrate what He was teaching. B. H. Carroll agrees, stating this “*cleansing*” typified the new birth and that Jesus was rebuking Nicodemus for being ignorant of the new birth as it was taught in the Old Testament:

“[Christ’s] teaching concerning this new birth was clearly taught in the Old Testament, for he rebukes Nicodemus, he being a teacher in Israel, for not understanding the new birth. If there had been any reference to baptism in the word ‘water,’ Nicodemus, as a teacher of the Old Testament, could not have been rebuked, because the Old Testament knew nothing of this New Testament ordinance of baptism. So that whatever ‘born of water and Spirit’ means, it is something unequivocally taught in the Old Testament.

“Where, then, is the Old Testament is it so plainly taught? The answer is, first, in Numbers 19. God, through Moses, makes provision for the typical purification of his people; a red heifer was killed and burned outside of the camp, her ashes gathered up and mixed with water and this lye of commingled ashes and water was kept for purification, hence the name ‘water of cleansing and purification.’ It was administered by taking a branch of hyssop and sprinkling it upon the one to be cleansed.

“In Ezekiel 36 we have a second exceedingly pertinent reference: There the prophet foretells that the dispersed Jews shall one day be gathered together and saved and ... he says that it is not on account of anything they have done. Then he describes how they are to be saved: ‘Then I will sprinkle the water of purification on you and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness and all

your iniquities. I will take away your stony heart and give you a heart of flesh, and put my spirit within you, and then ye shall keep my commandments.’ Here we have the first element of regeneration typified, in the water of cleansing; its second element in the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration always consists of two elements: first, cleansing; second, renewing. The cleansing always comes first.

“We have another reference to it in Psalm 51 where David says, ‘Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow; purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Renew a right spirit within me.’ Here are precisely the same thoughts presented by the psalmist, and they are the very thoughts presented by the Titus passage, the ‘washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,’ and it means exactly what it means in chapter 3 of John, ‘Born of water and Spirit.’ What then, does the water of purification, referred to in the Ezekiel and psalmist passages, typify? The answer is to be found in Hebrews 9: ‘For if the ashes of a heifer sanctify unto the cleansing of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ purify your conscience to serve the true and living God?’

“So that this water cleansing in Numbers and in Ezekiel, and in Psalm 51 and in John 3 refer to the cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ. When our Lord said to Nicodemus: ‘Except a man be born of water and Spirit’ it was the same as saying ‘Except a man be cleansed by the Spirit’s application of the blood of Christ, and by the Spirit’s renewal, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.’

“The proof positive of the matter is Christ’s answer to Nicodemus’ second question, ‘How can these things be?’ ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth.’ Nicodemus kept insisting, ‘How can these things be?’ And Jesus explained in this fashion: ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ That is how these things come about. That is, when Christ is held up before our eyes, in preaching, and we accept him as Savior, then the Holy Spirit first applies the blood of Christ to our hearts, purifying them, and then renews us, changing our nature.” [Carroll, *Interpretation of the English Bible*; vol. 6, pg. 112f]

Although I would not part fellowship over any of the above explanations, I believe Dr. Carroll’s understanding best fits the context.

## *titus 3:5 ...*

*“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 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; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:3-7)*

**GRATUITOUS READING INTO THE TEXT** — This is the second of our three verses which we labeled as being *gratuitous texts*. These were labeled thus because to read baptism into these verses is a *reading into the text* rather than an exposition *from the text*. As shown above, some read into John 3:5 the concept of baptism just because the word *water* is used. As we will see, the same principles apply here.

Prior to beginning it should be noted these last two controversial verses have even more in common than just being what we are calling *gratuitous texts*. These two verses are said to teach baptismal regeneration because of the wording “*washing of regeneration*” and “*washing of water by the word*.” The Greek word used here for *washing* is only used in Titus 3:5 and Ephesians 5:26. So these last two verses have much in common. For that reason, much of what is said here will also apply to the Ephesians passage.

**WASHING** — Gratuitous or not, it must be admitted the reading of baptism into these verses goes back to the church fathers. This is not unusual; someone once said that the canon of heresy closed the same time as the canon of Scripture. By that it is meant that most of our erroneous doctrines propagated today actually have ancient origins. This however does not lend any validity to the error. An error is an error, whether it is a new concoction or something which dates back to the ancient churches.

Part of the error relates to the Greek word itself. The Greek word translated here as *washing* is λουτρο– (loutrou). A form of the same word is used in Ephesians 5:26 (λουτρο– loutrō) and is the only two times that word is used in the New Testament. Some of the ancients translated this as *laver* instead of *washing*, referring to the wash-basin rather than the act of washing itself. From *laver* it was then taken to mean the *baptismal font* and therefore baptismal regeneration. (Note: it does not help to bring up the point that the early churches all practiced immersion and therefore it cannot refer to a *baptismal font* since no one could be immersed in a *font*. The roots of this word have to do with bathing, therefore if so understood, the *baptismal font* could be understood as a *baptismal tub*.)

It appears however that washing is a proper translation:

“The phrase *by the washing of regeneration* has been considerably discussed by commentators. The word *loutron* has been variously rendered *washing* (AV, RV, RSV) or ‘laver’ (RV margin), but support for the latter rendering is slight and was probably ‘coloured by the dogma of baptismal regeneration.’ In the LXX the word, which occurs three times only (Ct. iv. 2, vi. 5 and Ecclesus. xxxi. 25), on each occasion seems to represent not the receptacle but the washing itself.” [Gunthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*; pg. 205; italics his]

“The word properly means ‘a bath;’ then water for bathing; then the act of bathing, washing, ablution. It is used by Homer to denote a warm or cold bath; then a washing away, and is thus applied to the drink-offerings in sacrifice, which were supposed to purify or wash away sin. The word here does not mean ‘laver,’ or the vessel for washing in, which would be expressed by *λουτήρ* [loutēr] and this word cannot be properly applied to the baptismal font.” [Barnes, *Commentary on CD ROM*; vol. 15 pg. 886]

Several authors quote E. K. Simpson who did an in-depth study on this word:

“The version *laver* lacks corroboration, except in patristic treaties, coloured by the dogma of baptismal regeneration and the LXX term thus translated is *louter*, which undoubtedly signifies a bathing-tub.... It is chiefly in the plural that the word means baths. For the active sense of washing there is abundant evidence throughout Greek literature.” [Simpson, E. K., *The Pastoral Epistles*; q.v. Kent, *Pastoral Epistles*; pg. 234; italics his]

I realize this is not a cure-all but it does help in our understanding of this verse. If Paul wrote concerning a “*baptismal font of regeneration*,” one could understandably (although not definitively) take that to refer to baptismal regeneration. But apparently from the LXX use of the word as well as other examples found in Greek secular literature, *washing* is a proper translation.

Although this word is only used twice in the New Testament, the root of this word is used six times, each time translated *washed*. A couple times the word is used purely in a physical sense: in Acts 9:37 when Tabitha died and her body was *washed*; and in Acts 16:33 when Paul’s stripes were *washed*. Peter uses the word to refer to the pig who was *washed* but then returns to its old manner of life (2 Peter 2:22). The word is used one time in John 13:10 when Jesus was washing the feet of His disciples. Upon coming to Peter, Peter said he would not allow his feet to be washed by the Lord. Jesus responded if he was not washed, Peter had no part with Christ. Peter then responded to wash not just his feet but all of him, and Jesus answered using our word: “*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.*” (John 13:10) It is interesting to note in that passage the word washed is used several other times but to translate a different word which specifically means to wash a part of the body, in contrast to a full bath. For that reason the NIV translates the verse as follows: “*A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.*”

The other two times the root word is used has particular interest to our argument. The author of Hebrews used the word as follows:

“*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.*” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The reason I find this verse so interesting is the Jewish context in which it is found. Rather than my thoughts turning to a baptismal pool, the context of Hebrews would direct my attention to the Old Testament rituals. These ceremonies and washings are used in picture form to represent the cleansing presented by the offering of the body of Christ. This concept is reinforced when we consider the last time this root word is used:

*“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” (Revelation 1:5)*

To further add to our argument, let us look at one other form of this same word which is translated *wash* and used twice in the New Testament. A preposition is added as a prefix to give the word the sense of “*to wash off, to wash away.*” [*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*; pg. 666] It is this word which is used by Ananias when speaking to Paul in Acts chapter twenty-two:

*“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)*

As shown in the section above where Acts 22:16 was discussed, Ananias was speaking metaphorically, using baptism as a picture of what happens spiritually when one trusts Christ as Lord and Savior. This is further illustrated in the final usage of our word:

*“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)*

Paul here described the Corinthian believers who were steeped deep in sin but brought out of that sin by the grace of God. These terms used here all speak of the same act: *washed, sanctified, and justified*. Justification is that judicial act of God whereby He declares the sinner not guilty. Sanctification in this context is not the progressive sanctification, meaning our growth in the Christian life. Rather this verse speaks of the believers as being set apart for God’s use, separated from the penalty of sin which occurs at the moment of our salvation. Our third word speaks of the same act: the believer is *washed* at the moment of our salvation. This washing is not external and physical. Each of these actions are spiritual in its application. The washings throughout the Old Testament pictured this act of salvation: our sins are cleansed and washed away when the sinner repents and turns to Christ for salvation. The merits of Christ’s death and resurrection are applied to the believer and the sinner is set free. Washed in the blood of Christ ... what a wonderful teaching!

**IS BAPTISM AN IMPOSSIBLE INTERPRETATION?** — Charles Hodge in his commentary in Ephesians makes the comment that these verses are so universally understood to refer to baptism that it is not even up for discussion (he was speaking directly of Ephesians 5:26 but the application may be made to Titus 3:5 as well since the same wording is used):

*“Commentators, however, almost without exception understand the expression in the text to refer to baptism. The great majority of them, with Calvin and other of the Reformers, do not even discuss the question, or seem to admit any other interpretation possible. The same view is taken by all the modern exegetical writers. This unanimity of opinion is itself almost decisive.” [Hodge, *Ephesians*; pg. 318f]*

Who am I to argue with the great Charles Hodge? But I must make this point: it is perfectly natural for any paedobaptist (one who baptizes infants) to accept these verses as a reference to baptism. Even the most orthodox of the paedobaptist reformers has *at least the implications* of baptismal regeneration in their theology regarding baptizing an infant (see below). Therefore it would not be unusual to read baptism in these verses if all one studies is paedobaptist literature (which would include the majority of professed Christendom). Baptism however is not demanded and the Old Testament ritual washings makes just as much sense (or more) when placed in the context of first century Jewish believers. Hodge admits to that possibility:

“Does ‘the washing of water’ here mean baptism, or a washing which is analogous to a washing with water? The latter interpretation is admissible. ***The apostle may mean nothing more than a spiritual lustration.*** In Ez. 16, 9, speaking of Israel, God said, ‘Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil.’ And in 36, 25, ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.’ Also in Heb. 10, 22, it is said, ‘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.’ ***In all these cases washing with water is a figurative expression for spiritual purification.***” [Hodge, *Ephesians*; pg. 318; emphasis mine]

Could it refer to baptism and still not mean baptismal regeneration? That interpretation is possible. When I state Paul was quite possibly speaking of the Old Testament rituals, washings and purifications, in what manner was Paul making reference? He was using these external religious rituals as pictures of what occurs spiritually in the heart of all those who believe. If one was to remove the Old Testament washings and replace that with baptism, would that change the picture presented by Paul? Of course not. The body being *washed* in the waters of baptism would represent the spiritual cleansing of the soul from sin. Baptism is a possible interpretation therefore and still would not demand baptismal regeneration.

**CLARIFIED BY PAUL: NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** — As we consider the intent of “*washing of regeneration*” we cannot forget Paul’s words at the beginning of his statement: “*not by works of righteousness which we have done.*” As pointed out by the eighteenth century theologian John Gill, baptism is a work of righteousness:

“Not the ordinance of water baptism; for that is never expressed by washing, nor is it the cause or means of regeneration; the cause being the Spirit of God, the means the word of God.... Nor can it be opposed to works of righteousness, as this washing is: for that itself is a work of righteousness; see Matt 3:15; and if persons were saved by that, they would be saved by a work of righteousness, contrary to the text itself; but regenerating grace is meant, or a being born of water, and of the Spirit; that is, of the grace of the Spirit, comparable to water for its purity and cleansing virtue: hence such who are regenerated and sanctified, are said to be washed and cleansed, having their hearts purified by faith, and their consciences purged from sin by the blood of Christ.” [Gill, *Commentary*; vol. 6 pg. 670]

This is not to imply baptism is necessary for salvation; yea, we have spent the entire book proving baptism is not necessary to go to heaven. But baptism is a command of the Lord’s and is one of our first duties as believers. It is something done to “*fulfill all righteousness,*” that is, to live obediently to our Master. But that being so, it is a “*work of righteousness*” and Paul clearly states we cannot be saved by such actions.

**WHAT WAS PAUL SAYING?** — Paul therefore spoke metaphorically and spiritually when he used the phrase “*washing of regeneration.*” He was painting a picture of what happens to the sins of those who come

to Christ at the moment of their new birth. The picture Paul was bringing forth would probably have been closer to the Old Testament ceremonial washings than New Testament baptism, although every commentator brings up the subject of baptism. The teaching here might therefore be summed up as follows:

“The means employed in saving us is indicated by an additional modifier of the verb *he saved*, namely, through a washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. Note ‘through a *washing*,’ not ‘through a *laver* or *basin for washing*.’ The washing referred to is wholly spiritual. It is that of *regeneration and renewing*, regarded as one concept.... The present passage, in connection with the context, places emphasis on the following particulars in connection with [regeneration,] this wonderful work of God:

(1) It is the work of the Holy Spirit. This stands to reason, for in Scripture it is especially the third person of the Trinity who is represented as the bestower of life; hence, also of *spiritual* life. Also, it is he, the *Holy Spirit*, who takes the lead, as it were, in the work of making men *holy*.

(2) It precedes and gives rise to the process of *renewing*. While the latter is a life-long activity, the former is a single act, an instantaneous change.

(3) It affects the entire man. Note: ‘he saved *us*.’

(4) It is a *radical* change, so that those who beforehand were loaded down with the seven vices mentioned in verse 3 are now *in principle* adorned with the seven virtues mentioned in the verses 1 and 2.

The word *renewing* is found also in Rom. 12:2. That passage indicates that although this work, as well as regeneration, is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, there is this difference: *regeneration* is entirely the work of God, but in *renewing* or *sanctification* man as well as God takes part. While *regeneration* is never directly perceived by man, and becomes known to him only because of its effects, *renewal* requires the *conscious* and *continued* surrender of man’s whole personality to the will of God.” [Hendriksen, *Titus*; pg. 391; italics his]

## *ephesians 5:26 ...*

*“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, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”*

(Ephesians 5:25-27)

**SIMILAR TO THE TITUS PASSAGE** — As stated in the Titus 3:5 section above, many of the points given in that section directly relates to this verse as well. This section will therefore be short, adding just a few comments which relates to Ephesians 5:26 alone. For the interpretation of the wording “*washing by water,*” see above.

**THE BATH OF THE BRIDE PRIOR TO THE WEDDING?** — One interesting interpretation given by some commentators was of the ritualistic bath of the bride prior to the wedding. Here is one man’s comments which was typical of several commentaries:

“In all this there is an allusion doubtless to the various methods of purifying and cleansing those who were about to be married, and who were to be united to monarchs as their brides. In some instances this previous preparation continued for twelve months. The means of purification were various, but consisted usually in the use of costly unguents; see Esther 2:12. ‘Six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors, and with other things for the purifying of women;’ compare Psalm 45:13,14; Ezekiel 16:7-14. As such a virgin was purified and prepared for her husband by washing and by anointing, so the church is to be prepared for Christ. It is to be made pure and holy. Outwardly there is to be the application of water — the symbol of purity; and within there is to be holiness of heart; see the notes on 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Paul says of the Corinthians, ‘I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.’ “ [Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*; vol. 15 pg. 168]

This is a natural interpretation given Paul’s use of the husband and the wife as compared with the Lord’s assemblies and Christ Himself as the bridegroom. But there is one problem with that understanding:

“Many interpreters find in the phrase an allusion to the bath taken by a bride before her wedding. The subsequent imagery, and especially the *παραστησαι* [parastēsai = to present, v. 27; lit. to place beside] may favor that; but the fact that the Subject here who cleanses by the bath of the water is Christ, while it was not the *bridegroom* who administered the pre-nuptial bath to the bride makes that doubtful.” [Salmond; *Expositor’s Greek Testament*; vol. 3 pg. 368; italics his]

Therefore while not an impossible application of the text, it was either not Paul’s intent or it was stretched a little to fit the context.

**SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN EPHESIANS** — Aside from the general reasons given in the Titus 3:5 section above, there are reasons within the context of Ephesians itself to reject the baptismal regeneration interpretation. Here are some of the verses in Ephesians which directly speak of salvation, none of which has anything to do with baptism:

*“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”* (Ephesians 1:12)

*“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”* (Ephesians 1:13)

*“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus”* (Ephesians 1:15a)

*“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power”* (Ephesians 1:19)

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8)

*“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love”* (Ephesians 3:17)

One of the verses above is so critical that it bears emphasis:

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:8-10)

These are well-known verses, declaring salvation is (1) by grace, meaning receiving something we do not deserve; (2) through faith; and (3) specifically not by any works of our own. Yet as mentioned in previous sections, baptism is declared to be one of the works of righteousness (Matthew 3:15). Therefore Paul was not only speaking positively, *“salvation is by grace through faith alone,”* but negatively as well, *“not by any works which we might provide, baptism being one of these works.”* Paul does hasten to add that true faith brings forth good works (Ephesians 2:10) but is clear on the fact that salvation is not based upon such works; rather, salvation brings forth those works. That includes baptism.

Taking the book of Ephesians as a whole therefore, it is not logical to take clear statements of salvation based upon faith alone without any works on our part, and cast those aside based on one obscure verse of which the interpretation is doubtful. Better to interpret the difficult verse in light of clear statements of faith.

## *a review of the controversial verses ...*

We have spent much time evaluating each of the verses used to teach baptism is required to go to heaven. We have considered each of these verses in the context in which they were found. We have brought forth supporting texts to consider the New Testament as a whole since we believe there are no contradictions within the Word of God. We have come to the conclusion there was never any intent by the authors of these controversial verses to teach baptismal regeneration (nor was there ever any intent by the authors that these verses should even be *controversial!*).

Prior to continuing to the next section, let us sum up what each of these verses are teaching. I will do this by amplifying each of the verses to bring together what we have learned. These are more of a commentary than direct quotes. If there are questions as to the interpretations, the reader is directed back to the notes for that verse to substantiate my claims.

**ACTS 2:38** — *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent! Turn away from your sins and unto the crucified and risen Messiah for your salvation, placing your trust in His finished work on the cross alone for your salvation. If you trust Him alone for your salvation, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the moment you are saved. After receiving the Lord as your Savior, show forth your faith by identifying yourselves with Him in baptism.”*

**MARK 16:16** — *“He that believes shall be saved. That salvation shall be evidenced by aligning oneself with Christ in one’s life, beginning with baptism. He that does not believe shall be damned.”*

**ACTS 22:16** — *“And a man named Ananias came to Paul (who at that time was named Saul). Ananias was a devout man, living according to the Jewish law and had a good report of all the Jews who knew him. He said to Paul, ‘Saul, as my brother in Christ, receive your sight.’ And Paul’s eyes were healed and he looked upon him. Then Ananias said to Paul, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will, to see the risen and righteous Christ, and to hear His word. You will be a witness to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you delay? Arise and I will baptize you, which symbolically will show forth what has happened to you internally. Your sins were washed away by the blood of Christ and you were forgiven when you called upon the Lord for salvation. Your baptism will act as a picture and testimony of what happened to you at that time.’”*

**ROMANS 6:3** — *“We have looked at the doctrine of sin and discovered that to God, in the sense of guilt for sin, there is no difference between anyone on earth, whether a rank heathen or a religious Jew. Everyone has transgressed God’s laws and are therefore separated from God. We then looked at God’s plan of redemption through His Son Jesus Christ. Since all are lost and cannot be saved through any merits on their own, Christ took the punishment for our sins upon Him on the cross as a sacrificial lamb. Because of His death and resurrection, God may credit the sinner with the righteousness of Christ and fully accept the sinner as He would His own Son. This transaction is accomplished entirely by the grace of God*

*whenever anyone places their faith in Jesus, without any works on their own to merit such a salvation. Jesus is therefore the Head and Representative of a new humanity, just as Adam was the head and representative of the old fallen humanity. In consideration of the salvation provided by God's grace through faith, what are we to say? How are we to live? Since God is a forgiving God, are we to live sinfully to show God is good even when we do not deserve it? Do not even let that thought enter your mind! In our salvation, God crucified our old sinful nature and gave us a new holy nature likened unto His own. Let me picture it this way. Remember your baptism? When you were baptized, you were in picture form 'crucified,' 'buried' and then 'raised' out of the baptismal waters. All of this illustrates what happened at your salvation. Your old sinful nature is no longer the controlling factor in your life. Your new nature which is likened unto God's nature should now be the controlling factor in your life. We should therefore no longer be enslaved to sin since we are dead to the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are free to live unto God in holiness."*

**GALATIANS 3:27** — *"You Galatians who believe you can merit eternal life by outward obedience to the law, learn what the Old Testament has to say! Since you teach circumcision is necessary for eternal salvation, consider the source of our circumcision, our father Abraham. The promises and blessings of the covenant of God was given before Abraham was circumcised. This unconditional covenant was entirely by grace and cannot be altered. The important thing then is the promise and covenant given to Abraham, not the law which came hundreds of years later. Why then did God give the law? Nationally, the law was a temporary measure given until the Promised Seed of Abraham, Jesus, would come. This law is not opposed to God's original promise and covenant; rather it works in perfect cooperation with His covenant. If God could have saved us through the law then Christ would not have needed to come. But the law could not give life. Think of the law as a pedagogue (a child guardian), one who protects, prohibits and sometimes would even discipline us until we come to maturity. But when maturity comes, the child is no longer under the pedagogue and puts on the robe of an adult. In like manner on a personal level the law was our pedagogue, given as a mirror to reveal our sins to ourselves so we could understand we are sinners. Once we understand our guilt and helplessness before God, we were able to turn from our sins and embrace our Savior by faith without works. Now, having been saved by grace through faith, we are no longer under the law as our pedagogue. We had been 'brought to maturity,' we were free from the supervision of the law. As a mature child left the pedagogue and put on the robes of maturity, we left the law and 'put on' Christ, identifying ourselves with Him in our baptism. This is true of all believers regardless of race, gender or social status."*

**COLOSSIANS 2:12** — *"I realize there are those who teach you may reach a higher spiritual plane by such rituals as circumcision, observing special holy days, fastings and other ascetic practices. But that is not possible nor is it necessary! Jesus Christ is the 'pleroma,' the fulness of God in bodily form! In Christ and in Him alone can we attain spiritual fulness, forgiven of our guilt of sin and fully accepted in the sight of God. This is pictured in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Think of your circumcision. One of the reasons for that sign was to teach there was a problem with our physical heritage. Circumcision involved the cutting away of the flesh from the reproductive member. This was not because the reproductive act itself was sinful but rather because the product of our reproduction was a sinful human being. The problem was a corrupt seed, meaning our sinful nature inherited from Adam transmitted through natural generation. Circumcision symbolized the removing of the flesh from the seed. In like manner, when one puts*

*their faith in Christ, it is like we are spiritually cut off from our sinful nature and given new life in Christ. This is part of what circumcision should have always pictured. In like manner baptism by immersion portrays the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This too symbolizes what takes place spiritually when one puts their faith in Christ. We are spiritually slain, placed in the grave and then given the resurrected life of Christ. Baptism itself does not do this; but just as circumcision was an outward sign of an inward reality, so is baptism an outward sign of an inward reality. At salvation one is crucified with Christ, buried and raised again to live anew in Christ. We therefore have the fulness already and have no need to be brought to a 'higher plane' by rituals."*

**1 PETER 3:20,21** — *"Suffering must come, and if it is God's will, it is better to undeservingly suffer for being obedient to the Lord than to deserve to suffer because of disobedience. Consider Christ who was perfectly righteous and therefore did not deserve to suffer. Yet He suffered in our place in order to bring us unto Him. He was crucified and buried but now is risen again and is at the right hand of the Father with all creation in submission to Him. That should be our attitude! If we suffer for righteousness' sake, we should have the peace in our hearts that we suffer because we belong to God and have the guilt of our sins forgiven. We are finished with our sins and may now live in the will of God. As an example of patient suffering, think of the Lord while Noah and his family built the ark. But God eventually delivered His people (although only eight in number) while destroying those who rejected God. I cannot help but take this as a picture of our present-day baptism which pictures externally what happened internally when we placed our faith in the finished work of the resurrected Christ. (Not that baptism itself is effectual in obtaining the forgiveness of sins; rather it is our faith which we professed to have in Christ, if we made that profession of faith out of a pure heart, honest motives and a clear conscience.) So while we may suffer for righteousness' sake now, God will eventually deliver us and punish those who reject Him."*

**MATTHEW 3:11** — *"Then multitudes of people from Jerusalem, Judaea, and the region around the Jordan came to John the Baptist. They confessed themselves as sinners needing repentance and John baptized them in the Jordan. But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, 'O you generation of snakes, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath of God? Repent from your sins and turn to God, and let me see the fruit of your changed lives. Don't think you do not need repentance merely because you are a physical heir of Abraham. The fact you are Jews and live according to Jewish traditions does not merit salvation. And all those unsaved will be judged. How close is this judgement? It's as if one needs to cut down a bush and brings forth an ax, and the ax is laid aside the bush to give it one more chance. But the judgement is ready to fall, and everyone who does not repent will be cast into everlasting punishment. If you repent, I will baptize you with water as a public witness of your repentance.'"*

**MARK 1:4 (parallel passage LUKE 3:3)** — *"John was in the wilderness, preaching everyone had to repent and turn to God for salvation. John baptized all who repented because their sins have been forgiven. This baptism made a public proclamation that they were now following the Lord."*

**JOHN 3:5** — *"Nicodemus was a Pharisees who was also a member of the Sanhedrin. He came to Jesus one night saying, 'Rabbi, we know you are a Teacher sent from God because no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God was not with him.' Jesus disregarded the compliment and made this statement, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter into God's kingdom unless he is born again from above. Nicodemus was confused and asked, 'How can someone be born again? Surely he cannot enter into his mother's womb to be born physically a second time, can he?' Jesus answered Nicodemus and said to him, 'No, I am not speaking of a second physical birth. What I am speaking of is a spiritual birth, being made*

*alive by the Spirit of God and being cleansed from our sin. This is taught symbolically in the Old Testament in several places by the ritualistic washings with water. Do not then be surprised by my saying, you must be born again spiritually. Let me give you an illustration. The wind blows where it wants. You cannot see the wind but you can hear it and see the effects of it. That's the way it is with everyone who is born of the Holy Spirit. It is a mystery, something we cannot plan nor control. But when the Holy Spirit works in the heart of a sinner, we can see the effects by a changed life.' Nicodemus responded by asking, 'How can this be?' Jesus then rebuked Nicodemus, saying, 'You are one who teaches religion in Israel, one who is conversant in the Old Testament, and yet you do not know these things?'"*

**TITUS 3:5** — *“The kindness and love of God our Savior has appeared to man. He saved us by His mercy and not according to any works of righteousness we have done. He cleansed us from our sin as symbolized by the ritualistic washings, and gave us new life by the Holy Spirit, which He abundantly shed on us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Being justified by His grace, we have been made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

**EPHESIANS 5:26** — *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the assembly and gave Himself for it. He will sanctify it by cleansing it, as illustrated by the ritualistic washings. He will present it to Himself as a glorious assembly, not having spot, wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish.”*

## *the Bible, salvation and baptism in general ...*

We have discovered the baptismal regeneration teaching falls apart when we consider each of the controversial verses in their respective contexts. Let us look now to other arguments against this teaching.

**SALVATION IS CONDITIONED UPON REPENTANCE AND FAITH** — The conditions given in the New Testament for salvation from the guilt of our sins are repentance and faith (John 3:16,18; 5:24;20:31; Luke 13:3; Acts 16:31; Romans 3:25,26; 4:5; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 2:8; Phil 3:9; et. al.). Faith precedes baptism (Acts 2:41; 10:45-47; 19:1-5) and one exercising faith is already saved (John 3:18; 1 John 5:1). Therefore baptism cannot be the means of eternal salvation from the guilt of sins.

“As marriage should never be solemnized except between persons who are already joined in heart and with whom the outward ceremony is only the sign of an existing love, so baptism should never be administered except in the case of those who are already joined to Christ and who signify in the ordinance their union with him in his death and resurrection.” [Strong, *Theology*; pg. 946]

“At least sixty times in the New Testament, eternal salvation is explicitly tied to faith and / or repentance with no mention of baptism.... The general teaching of Scripture, then, is that those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. Baptism, obedient living, a transformed life, and many other aspects of the Christian life will ordinarily in due time result from this saving faith. But salvation is not itself the result of any of these things.” [Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*; pg. 136,139]

“The teaching of Scripture on this subject is held to be that salvation is immediately dependent on faith, which, as a fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God in the soul, already, in its reception of Christ, implies regenerating action of that Spirit, and is itself one evidence of it. To faith in Christ is attached the promise of forgiveness, and of all other blessings. Baptism is administered to those who already possess (at least profess) this faith, and symbolizes the dying to sin and renewal by God’s Spirit, but not the agency effecting that renewal, even instrumentally.” [Orr, *Baptismal Regeneration* article in ISBE; vol. 1 pg. 397]

“When faith has been exercised, regeneration is complete; hence baptism which follows faith cannot be instrumental in regeneration.” [Simmons, *Bible Doctrine*; pg. 286]

The New Testament evidence supporting repentance and faith as the criteria for salvation is overwhelming. See appendix A for a listing of verses throughout the New Testament which bear record of salvation being by grace through faith.

**THE NEW TESTAMENT ORDER IS MAKE DISCIPLES, THEN BAPTIZE THOSE DISCIPLES** — When John the Baptist began his ministry, he had a distinct order of events which he followed and from which he never varied: *he first made disciples and then baptized those disciples*. The fact he would never

baptize anyone unless they showed credible evidence of their salvation was shown in the Matthew 3:11 section above:

*“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”* (Matthew 3:7,8)

As John the Baptist was passing off the scene, there was a shift in emphasis from John to Jesus Christ and His band of apostles. This nucleus church followed the same God-ordained order: *they first made disciples and then baptized those disciples*:

*“When therefore the LORD knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)...”* (John 4:1,2)

It is interesting here to note there is a distinction between making disciples and baptizing disciples. That is important because if one is saved in the act of water baptism, baptizing disciples would be equivalent to making disciples.

As Jesus finished His earthly ministry, one of the last things He said was what we know as the Great Commission:

*“Go ye therefore, and teach [literally, ‘make disciples’] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* (Matthew 28:19,20)

Charles Williams translates the verse as follows:

*“Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to practice all the commands that I have given you.”* (Matthew 28:19,20; Williams’ NT)

Here again is the God-ordained order: *first make disciples and then baptize those disciples*.

This same order may be found as we continue into the historical book of Acts:

*“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”* (Acts 8:12)

Philip followed the God-ordained order: *first make disciples and then baptize those disciples*.

As mentioned above in the Acts 2:38 discussion, Peter refused to baptize the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house until he was confident of their faith in Christ:

*“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?”* (Acts 10:45-47)

So Peter followed the God-ordained order: *first make disciples and then baptize those disciples*.

Paul as well refused to baptize Lydia prior to her profession of faith in Christ:

*“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”* (Acts 16:14,15)

Lydia showed forth fruit of God having opened her heart in salvation prior to her baptism. Paul therefore followed the God-ordained order: *first make disciples and then baptize those disciples.*

Paul later at Corinth experienced the same thing:

*“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”* (Acts 18:8)

Once again we see Paul followed the God-ordained order: *first make disciples and then baptize those disciples.*

Throughout the gospels and into the book of Acts we see the only ones baptized are those who come to Christ, believing in Him and confessing their desire to follow Him. We understand not everyone who makes an outward profession to follow Christ is genuinely saved, and some “disciples” who begin well will fall away and reject their initial profession. But for our present discussion, the truth is still there: only those who profess to be a disciple of Christ (in other words, *“profess faith in Christ”*) are eligible for baptism. This is and has always been the God-ordained order:

*“As intrusted with the administration of the ordinances, however, the church is, on its part, to require of all candidates for baptism credible evidence of regeneration. This follows from the nature of the church and its duty to maintain its own existence as an institution of Christ. The church which cannot restrict admission into its membership to such as are like itself in character and aims must soon cease to be a church by becoming indistinguishable from the world.”* [Strong, *Theology*; pg. 949]

Therefore since a profession of faith in the risen Savior is necessary prior to baptism, baptism is not a requirement to go to heaven.

**BAPTISM DECLARED TO BE SEPARATE FROM THE GOSPEL** — Another argument against baptismal regeneration is a statement made by Paul in the first chapter of his letter to the Corinthians.

Here is the background behind Paul’s statement. There was great division within the Corinthian church because different members of the church were forming cliques around personalities. Some followed Apollos, some the apostle Peter, some followed Paul himself, and others (who undoubtedly considered themselves the most spiritual) followed Christ alone:

*“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 1:11,12)

Paul rebukes this kind of divisive mentality and encourages the assembly of believers to think as one body. That counsel is outside our present discussion however. What is important to our discussion is the comment Paul made while attempting to bring unity to the brethren:

*“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? 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.” (1 Corinthians 1:14-17)*

What an incredible statement as it relates to our discussion! Let us draw forth several lessons from his comment.

First, Paul’s mission was ***not centered on baptism***. But if baptism is required to go to heaven then what Paul is saying was this: *“God separated me from my mother’s womb to serve Him, to tell others about the crucified and risen Savior, to bring them to the point of salvation and then deny them that salvation.”* That is unimaginable. Paul’s mission was to bring others into the kingdom of God, gather them together into organized assemblies, and appoint pastors over those assemblies to further teach the Christian life. Part of that included baptism and we must be careful not to give the impression baptism is unimportant. But Paul kept baptism in its proper place: secondary to the issue of salvation, and even more so when some would misinterpret the emphasis of baptism and make it an area of division.

Secondly, we are confronted with ***the priority of preaching the gospel message***. As we consider Paul’s mission, we see time and time again Paul places the emphasis on the preaching of the gospel. To clarify, the gospel itself is defined as the good news concerning the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners:

*“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” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4)*

Paul states it is this gospel message which is used by God to bring salvation:

*“... for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:15b; note additionally there is no place in the Scriptures where it says “I have begotten you through baptism.”)*

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16a)*

This message is so important that Paul places a curse upon those who would twist the message:

*“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8,9)*

Yet when considering baptism, Paul states he is thankful he baptized so few of the believers in Corinth. If baptism were one of the terms of salvation, Paul was thanking God that he had refused to perform one of the things essential to salvation. This greatly argues against baptism being a requirement to go to heaven.

There is one more item we should comment on prior to continuing. As we have noted before and will expound upon in the final portion of the book, it is important to see the identification aspect of baptism. The Corinthians were arguing over personalities and part of the argument Paul uses to correct their thinking was regardless of who baptized them, they were baptized *unto Christ*. Therefore their identification and allegiance should be with the risen Lord and not human personalities.

**IF BAPTISM IS REQUIRED TO GO TO HEAVEN, THEN OUR SALVATION IS A SACERDOTAL SALVATION** — One of the greatest teachings of the New Testament is the fact that no other man has ultimate authority over another person's eternal destiny. This is part of what is called "soul liberty" and involves both *freedom* (we are free to make eternal choices without external coercion) and *responsibility* (we must live eternally with the consequences of those decisions). But baptismal regeneration destroys this soul liberty and makes our salvation a "*sacerdotal*" salvation. Dr. B. H. Carroll explains it thusly:

"[If baptism is required for us to go to heaven, then our salvation] is a sacerdotal salvation, since it requires the presence, the office and performance of another party, the administrator of the ordinances, and thereby securing our salvation, making you responsible, when your salvation is dependent upon somebody else, and on what somebody else does. That is what we call 'sacerdotal' — *sacer*, a Latin word for priest — a priestly salvation. This requires competent authority to pronounce on the fitness of the 'sacer' (priest) or administrator, and thus makes it an endless question with any man as to whether he is saved until he can prove that the one that baptized him is a qualified administrator, and thereby contradicting the statement of Paul, that God made salvation by faith, i.e., I may repent and believe by myself, just thinking about the Bible, or reasoning about it." [Carroll, *Interpretation of Bible*; vol. 5 pg. 82; italics his]

Baptismal regeneration teaches that for anyone to go to heaven depends in part on the qualifications and actions of another. If that person is unqualified then even if one goes through all the proper motions, their salvation is incomplete and lacking. They could be lost without knowing so and by no fault of their own.

This sounds objectionable and the first reaction by those who teach baptismal regeneration might be to deny these statements. But if that is not true then why does every Church of Christ require you to be baptized by a Church of Christ pastor? If I was baptized by a Baptist, a Church of God, or a Brethren pastor, why would my baptism be invalid? With or without making direct statements, what the Campbellites are saying is the authority of the Church of Christ and the qualifications of the Church of Christ pastor is what validates the baptism (or should I say, validates the salvation?). That salvation is therefore sacerdotal and there is no longer only one intercessor between the sinner and God. This is true not just of the Church of Christ but also of others who teach baptismal regeneration.

The Bible argues against sacerdotal salvation:

*"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* (1 Timothy 2:5)

The proper manner by which men are saved is entirely personal without a human intercessor. One hears the word of God and that does typically occur at the hands of others in some fashion or another. But what happens thereafter is entirely internal. The person will by nature reject the things heard in the Word of God unless the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the heart of the sinner. The sinner then becomes aware he is lost and guilty before a holy God but still runs, denying the truth, rationalizing and excusing himself, lying to

himself. If that is as far as it goes then the sinner will eventually die lost, paying the full penalty for his sins by being eternally separated from his God. But for some the Holy Spirit continues to work, destroying the excuses and the rationalizations. Eventually in desperation the sinner bends the knees before God, confessing his need of forgiveness, trusting entirely upon the work done by Christ on the cross and submitting himself to the authority of God. As C. S. Lewis put it, it was the freest act ever done by the sinner, yet it was also what he could not escape doing. When that person repents and places his faith in Christ, God forgives the sinner and brings him into the kingdom of God.

Throughout the entire procedure there may have been outside influences of friends and family who witnessed and prayed for the sinner. But every decision and every action regarding the sinner's soul was entirely internal and personal. The sinner was being dealt with one-on-one by God Himself in the Person of the Holy Spirit. No one could have forced the sinner to God nor could anyone have prevented the sinner from responding to God. This is soul liberty and is the teaching of the New Testament. Any other outside influence destroys that truth.

Therefore because our salvation cannot be dependent upon any other person or authority, baptism cannot be a requirement to go to heaven.

**THOSE DECLARED TO BE SAVED WITHOUT HAVING BEEN BAPTIZED REFUTE BAPTISMAL REGENERATION** — Another reason to reject baptismal regeneration is the New Testament gives ample evidence of those who are declared to be saved from the guilt of their sin prior to baptism. Some examples are as follows:

- the paralytic lowered on his mat by his friends: *“And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”* (Matthew 9:2)
- the woman who wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair at the house of Simon: *“And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”* (Luke 7:48-50)
- Zacchaeus in the tree as Jesus passed below: *“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* (Luke 9:8-10)
- the thief on the cross crucified the same time as Jesus: *“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:42,43)
- Cornelius and his household in Acts chapter ten: *“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? 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 11:17,18)

- the Gentiles in Antioch: *“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”* (Acts 11:21)
- the Philippian jailer and his household: *“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.... And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”* (Acts 16:30,31;34)

Outside of the New Testament are other examples. For one to accept baptismal regeneration is to deny there are deathbed salvations, for there are those who make such a profession without the time to be baptized. Further, entire denominations would also have to be rejected because they falsely teach baptism is not required in this New Testament age (for example, Quakers, the Salvation Army, and hyper-dispensationalists who believe baptism is an Old Testament ritual only). These groups may be in error but is that to allocate all its members to a lost eternity due to faulty Bible exegesis of a minor issue?

Therefore because there are those who are manifestly saved from the guilt of their sins without baptism proves baptismal regeneration to be a false teaching.

**THE BELIEVER’S PERSONAL TESTIMONY** — There is a principle used by Paul in the book of Galatians which has application to our discussion. Here is what Paul wrote:

*“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”*  
(Galatians 3:2,3)

As mentioned in the Galatians 3:27 comments above, the believers in Galatia were being influenced by Jewish legalists who taught Christians had to be circumcised in order to be sanctified and accepted by the Lord. One of the arguments used by Paul was to take the disciples back to their own salvation experience. His question to them is simply this: *“How were you saved — by obeying the works of the law or by faith? If you were saved entirely by faith, what makes you believe you must now be sanctified by works?”*

I realize the context is different but the same argument might be applied against baptismal regeneration. In my situation, the question might be asked, *“Why am I so certain baptism is not required to go to heaven?”* Among the answers given (which would include the arguments presented in this book) would be my own personal experience. The Lord had been speaking to my heart for several years while in the Navy but I came to be under even deeper conviction in the months following my discharge from the service. One evening between Christmas and New Years in 1977 the Lord brought it to a climax. I was alone at home when the Lord once again brought the emptiness of my life into direct focus. The normal escapisms I had come to depend upon did not bring the satisfaction they used to bring. My life was dirty and sinful and I was fully conscious of my lost condition before God. It was then in the quiet hours of the night that I surrendered my heart to Christ and repented of my sins. I instantly was relieved of the burden of my sin and felt a peace and joy unlike anything I had ever experienced. Since that evening in December I have had no drugs nor alcohol. I was free from the sin which I before had willingly embraced and the Lord set me on the path of His ways.

This was all prior to my baptism. I later talked to family members who were saved and I began attending a church they had recommended. It was there I was exposed to the fact I should be baptized and I willingly took that step. In January of 1978 I submitted to the ordinance of baptism and joined a church for the first time in my life.

Applying Paul's argument to my circumstance: "*Was I saved by trusting Christ, by faith alone or was I born again (regenerated) by my baptism?*" — in my life there is no question. I was saved in December 1977 and I knew I was on my way to heaven at that point, even though I was not baptized for another month.

I understand that argument is entirely subjective and others could say that is not their testimony. But there are many others who would agree their testimony is similar to my own. That is in fact the argument of Paul to the Galatians: "*How were you saved? — works or faith?*" That is a powerful argument.

**HISTORICAL FRUIT OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION** — The Scriptures teach that by their fruits you will know them. It would therefore be beneficial to look at some of the "fruit" brought forth from the belief in baptismal regeneration (much of the following was gleaned from Dr. B. H. Carroll's commentary).

One of the fruits of baptismal regeneration became evident early in church history. If baptism was the means by which sins were washed away in the most literal sense, and baptism was only to be received once, then logically it was wise to ***delay receiving baptism***.

"From the time of Augustine and Tertullian it was very manifest. Tertullian said, 'Why hurry baptism? All the sins you commit up to that time are washed away. Then put it off as long as possible.'" [Carroll, *Interpretation of Bible*; vol. 5 pg. 99]

Another error which followed baptismal regeneration was ***the baptizing of infants***. If all people are born sinners but baptism washes away sin, then the prudent thing to do is baptize an infant as soon as possible. This is without question the original motive behind paedobaptism as shown below.

This error also brought forth other errors. If baptism washed away sins in the most literal sense and this baptism was received as an infant, then obviously there was ***no need for believer's baptism***. Believer's baptism is the teaching that only believers are to receive baptism and therefore no infant is qualified to receive baptism. As shown above, the New Testament order of events is for one to first come to faith in Christ and repent of their sins and only then receive baptism. Every baptism in the New Testament was performed upon believers and no one in history has ever been able to disprove that fact. The baptizing of infants and no longer baptizing believers only is a product of human wisdom and logic, not Bible exegesis.

As one sin leads to others, the baptizing of infants also led to another error: ***unregenerate church members***. The uniform teaching throughout professing Christendom is people are not brought into the membership of the church without first being baptized (for exceptions, see above of groups who do not baptize). Those churches who teach believer's baptism accepts the New Testament order of one first coming to faith in Christ and then seeking union with a fellowship of believers. The assembly (church) would question the candidate as to secure as much as humanly possible an assurance of a true salvation experience, bring the matter before the church body for a congregational vote, and then baptize the candidate upon his profession of faith. The reasoning behind such order is to ensure (again, as much as humanly possible) that everyone who is a member of the assembly is truly born again or *regenerate*. This is also the reason for the congregation voting on the candidate. If there was one in the assembly who had reason to believe the candidate did not have a true salvation experience then that one should vote against church membership and the situation should be further investigated. This is also one of the reasons for church discipline. When a

member of the assembly lives in a manner unbecoming a Christian, the other members of the assembly are duty-bound to help the erring member correct their lifestyle. If help is rejected then church discipline is to be evoked and the erring member is to be officially separated from the membership of the church. This is not only to help bring the erring one back and to protect the remaining membership of the assembly, but also to maintain a regenerate membership. Scripturally, if a church member turns away from the faith and refuses to repent, the assembly accepts that as evidence of never having truly been saved and separates from the erring member. This is not to assume perfect knowledge and final judgement, and that erring member may truly be saved. But until that member repents and returns to a life of obedience, the church must accept that member's actions as evidence of not belonging to Christ.

But what does baptizing infants do to this teaching? If one is baptized as an infant, the initial procedures of church membership has begun. Most paedobaptist churches of which I am aware include some kind of confirmation service as the child reaches a certain age. After confirmation, the candidate is accepted as a member in the church with full privileges. Therefore the candidate is baptized while at a stage in life when they cannot know good or evil, then are later taught in the ways of the church and if outwardly accepted, are initiated into full church membership. A person could easily live their entire life without ever having to confront the fact they are a sinner in the need of a Savior. True salvation may even be taught during confirmation but was the child ready to accept Christ by faith and truly repent from their sins or was it more a matter of schedule: the child has reached a certain age and confirmation classes are to begin? Undoubtedly some may have had that experience in their life and may truly be in the family of God, but the great probability of bringing unregenerate people into the membership of the church cannot be denied. If this be so, eventually the assembly is filled with those who do not have the mind of Christ and soon the assembly begins to reject His teachings for human wisdom. Even if outwardly the church has many members, much money, activity, and great influence in the community, in the eyes of God the church is apostate and He removes their candlestick (Revelation 2:5).

Another unfortunate fruit of baptismal regeneration is *the rejection of immersion as baptism*. That the early church practiced baptism by immersion only is admitted by almost everyone who studies church history. Those who still insist on immersion-only return to the Scriptures and place great emphasis upon the original act. Those who do not immerse or at least practice other forms of baptism in addition to immersion insist the actual manner of baptism is not important and being dipped or sprinkled is an acceptable substitute. As infants began to be baptized it was not long before it was questioned whether it was important to immerse such a young infant when sprinkling or dipping was easier and perhaps safer. Admittedly, this transition may have come without the teaching of baptismal regeneration, but it must be admitted baptismal regeneration and the baptizing of infants at the minimum speeded the departure from immersion. For those who practice immersion-only, this is a grave error and another reason to disapprove of baptismal regeneration. Dr. B. H. Carroll gives this story in relation to this fact:

“Dr. Burleson was once telling a Campbellite friend of ours, Dr. Carrington of Austin — we both thought a great deal of him — that if there were no infant baptism in the world today, that which he (the Campbellite friend) was preaching would bring it about. ‘Oh, no,’ he said, ‘that could not do it.’ Yet it happened with this very Brother Carrington that he was sent for by a family, and the mother said, ‘Brother Carrington, my preacher is gone; you are a preacher, not of my faith, it is true, but you are a preacher, and here’s my baby about to die; I believe it is lost if it is not baptized, and I ask you to baptize the baby’ — and Dr. Carrington, the Campbellite preacher, sprinkled the baby! That is a fact of Texas history. I do not like that fruit.” [Carroll, *Interpretation of Bible*; vol. 5 pg.

Therefore as we evaluate the fruit of baptismal regeneration, we discover great harm has been done to the kingdom of God because of this teaching. By such fruit we further reject the belief baptism is necessary for salvation.

**BAPTISMAL REGENERATION ROOTED IN PAGANISM?** — The commentators make an interesting observation on the verses at the beginning of Romans chapter six concerning Paul’s statement, “*Know ye not...*” (Romans 6:3a). The commentators theorize how the Roman believers “knew” what Paul was about to remind them of regarding the relationship of their baptism, the death of Christ and sanctification. It could not have been learned from Paul directly since he had never been to Rome up to that point. Was what Paul about the say a common teaching, understood by all the early believers? Or was Paul’s comments based upon other influences outside Christianity?

The reason for their theorizing is documents discovered in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century that describe ancient pagan cult rituals. C. E. B. Cranfield makes these comments concerning these archaeological discoveries:

“At this point the question arises: How did Paul understand the relation between baptism and this relationship of the Christian to Christ and, in particular, to His death? The suggestion has been made — and it has been fairly widely accepted — that Paul was deeply influenced in his understanding of baptism (and indeed of the Christian’s relationship to Christ as a whole) by the pagan mystery cults. It was characteristic of these cults that of central importance was a god who died and rose again, and that initiation rites were supposed to accomplish the union of the postulant with the god.” [Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 1 pg 301f]

James D. G. Dunn in his commentary on Romans makes these additional observations concerning the pagan mystery religion rituals:

- the devotees are twice referred to as being “born again” in a document called the Apuleius text, relating to the pagan Isis cult
- the same document speaks of the devotee undergoing “death” and “life” obtained by grace [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 1 pg 309]

Prior to drawing some conclusions, it is important to note that while there are similarities between the pagan mystery cult rituals and Romans chapter six, there are also major differences. Today, conservative scholars deny Paul relied upon the mystery religions for his theology. Dunn summarizes the significance of these archaeological documents with Paul’s comments in Romans in the following manner:

“On the basis of this evidence it can be firmly concluded that a direct influence from any mystery cult or from the Isis cult in particular, on Paul or on the theology of Rom 6:3-4, is most unlikely.” [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 1 pg 310]

Other scholars agree:

“The introductory words of verse 3 assume that the Roman believers are (or at least should be)

familiar with Paul's ensuing comments on baptism. The extent to which pre-Pauline tradition is drawn on and corrected or elaborated is a matter of debate. It was quite popular at the beginning of the twentieth century to see Paul as dependent on the mystery religions. But this view has been thoroughly discredited by the careful work of Wagner (1967). Those who postulate interaction with the mysteries today no longer suggest direct dependence." [Schreiner, *Romans*, pg 306]

Therefore any similarities between the mystery cults' ritualistic washings and Paul's theology are apparently coincidental (or possibly reversed: the pagans may have copied Christian terminology in their rituals). But that is not to say these archaeological discoveries have no impact upon our study.

Consider the following. If the Apostles did not teach baptismal regeneration then the earliest converts to Christianity would have fully understood their baptism was symbolic in nature only. They would have heard Peter preaching about the need to "repent and be baptized" and have recognized that they were being asked to prove their allegiance to their Messiah by stepping out from among the crowd and publicly taking a stand alongside the other believers, regardless of the cost. They would have heard Paul preaching about the "washing" of baptism and have seen the symbolism therein, realizing that Paul was teaching their sins could be thoroughly cleansed because of the merits of the atoning death of Christ, as pictured in baptism. The earliest believers would not have confused the symbol with reality. The doctrine would have been pure.

Then how did this error find its way within the walls of the church? Of course it is possible that as Christianity spread to areas in which there were not enough knowledgeable teachers to correctly handle the word of God, some believers may have taken some of our controversial passages too literal without properly evaluating the New Testament as a whole. The baptismal regeneration error could have entered Christianity in that manner.

But this scenario is also just as likely: Christianity spread rapidly when the faith was quite young. In like manner as above, it may have spread to areas where there were too few capable teachers for the number of believers. In addition to that is the fact that some of these new converts would have come out of paganism. Some undoubtedly had worshiped other gods in manners as we now know existed around the time of Christ. These pagans had been "united" to their gods through a ceremonial washing similar to Christian baptism. Those who had thus been initiated would remember the ceremony when they "died" and "rose" with their pagan deity and were now "born again" into their mystery cult religion.

Then they heard the gospel and realized that Jesus Christ was the one and only true God, the Creator of all things. They turned from their pagan ways and embraced the cross. But as they grew in their new Christian faith, they heard teachings of the need to be "*baptized for the remission of sins*" and that unless they were born "*of water and of the spirit*" they could not see the kingdom of God. Perhaps even unconsciously they took such terms in the manners in which they were accustomed, not knowing they were misinterpreting and twisting the words of the apostles. With lack of proper teaching, the error spread to others who perhaps had similar background. Is not such a situation possible?

Such a beginning would naturally be rejected by those who embrace baptismal regeneration (of course they would not need an explanation as to how the doctrine "crept into" the apostolic teaching because they believe it *is* an apostolic teaching). But if there is no connection between baptismal regeneration and the pagan mystery religions, why did some theologians believe for over half a century that Paul was basing his theology on these ancient rituals? C. E. B. Cranfield agrees and makes this connection between baptismal regeneration and the ancient pagan cult religions:

“Another view is that of A. Schweitzer. In most respects altogether different from the suggestion we have just been considering, it nevertheless agrees with it in attributing to Paul a magical understanding of baptism as effecting *ex opere operato* what it signifies.... In Paul’s view, according to Schweitzer, ‘in the moment when’ a man ‘receives baptism, the dying and rising again of Christ takes place in him without any co-operation, or exercise of will or thought, on his part.’”  
[Cranfield, *Romans*, vol 1 pg 302f]

To summarize: it is obvious that there was an understanding within the pagan world in the centuries following Christ that initiates could be united to their god(s) in a ceremonial washing in which they were “born again.” I believe I have proven in this book that this teaching is foreign to the teaching of the Apostles. Therefore it is well within the realm of possibility that the error entered Christianity unwittingly by those who were either saved out of paganism or were false converts who made a profession of faith yet still clung to their pagan ways. Although it would be impossible to prove after two thousand years, it is entirely plausible and in my mind quite likely that baptismal regeneration has its roots in paganism.

**BAPTISMAL REGENERATION AND THE BAPTIZING OF INFANTS** — A complicated item which deserves some notice is the inconsistency belonging to those who baptize infants and baptismal regeneration. To fully examine this would require a book in itself and would only serve to distract from the major thesis of this writing, but I do want to bring it to the reader’s attention.

Prior to looking at the inconsistency, let us review baptism itself. Those who teach baptismal regeneration believe someone cannot be *born again* or *regenerated* outside of the act of water baptism. According to that teaching, while it is important to believe Jesus is the Lord and Savior, the act of salvation is incomplete until one is baptized. It is in the waters of baptism their sins are washed away and they are forgiven, regenerated, and given new life in Christ.

In contrast to that teaching we have proven there is no inherit power within baptism which effects any spiritual change. Salvation from the judicial punishment of sins occurs when one realizes he is a sinner, unable to merit forgiveness by his own efforts. Falling before God in repentance, he then places his trust on the merits of what Jesus Christ has done for him — the sinless life, the sacrificial death and the bodily resurrection from the dead to prove Who He is and what He had done as being sufficient to obtain forgiveness. When he realizes he has been running away from God and returns to Him in submission (repentance), acknowledging Christ died for his sin and is worthy to be obeyed (faith), he is forgiven on the merits of Christ’s work. A transaction takes place: the righteousness of Jesus Christ is given to the forgiven sinner and all the sinner’s guilt is given to Christ (Romans chapter four). By repentance and faith the sinner is accepted by God.

After having been accepted by God, the forgiven sinner is now willing to obey the Lord. This involves a change in all that person is: his talk, his friends, where he goes and what he does, his spending habits are changed, his external looks are effected, everything about the person is new and different. As he learns more of the new life in Christ, more changes occur. This is called sanctification and unfortunately does not always occur as rapidly nor as consistently as it should, but it definitely takes place over a period of time.

One such item of change is that the new believer realizes he should align himself with Christ and His

people. An important item included in that identification is the act of baptism. Once shown from the Scripture the obligation to be baptized, the forgiven sinner should willingly obey his new Master and follow in the waters of baptism. What takes place at that moment is entirely symbolic. No sins are forgiven at that point for they were all forgiven at the moment of repentance and faith. No new birth is given for that also occurred at the moment of repentance and faith. Nothing new spiritually is added to the forgiven sinner when they are baptized. The only things accomplished are symbolic in nature: the forgiven sinner is now publically making their stand with Christ and has been obedient to one of the commands of Christ. ***This deserves repeating: baptism is symbolic as to what it portrays and effects no spiritual change in and of itself, other than the fact the forgiven sinner has obeyed a command of Scripture. The forgiven sinner is not “more” saved or “more” forgiven after baptism nor was anything missing from the forgiven sinner’s salvation prior to baptism. Although baptism is important as an act of obedience, the act of baptism itself is symbolic only.***

This is confessed for the most part by all who reject the teachings of baptismal regeneration. But there is an interesting inconsistency of those teaching the doctrines of grace, believing salvation is entirely of God and is received by faith when one repents of their sin, and yet baptizing infants. In some of their teachings they deny baptism having any effectual work in the one being baptized since salvation is all of grace. I agree with that teaching. But when the topic of the baptizing of infants arise, the tenor changes and it is as if there is value in the act of baptism. It is difficult to explain yet I see the same inconsistency in several writings of paedobaptists (those who baptize infants).

One such example is **Robert Lewis Dabney**, an acknowledged leader in the Southern Presbyterian church. A. A. Hodge called him “the best teacher of theology in the United States, if not in the world.” His Systematic Theology is classified among the best. In it Dabney conclusively destroys the baptismal regeneration argument using many of the arguments mentioned in this book. But read his comments regarding infant baptism:

“Further: it does not follow that because infants cannot exercise intelligent graces, therefore there is no sense nor reason in administering to them sacraments significant thereof. Infants are capable of redemption. Glorious truth! Why, then, should it appear a thing incredible that they should partake of the sacraments of redemption? Baptism signifies God’s covenant with souls, as well as their covenant with Him.... The major premise of our argument is, that baptism is, in all cases, the proper rite by which to recognize membership in the visible Church. The minor premise is, the infants of believing parents are members of the visible Church of Christ. Hence, the conclusion: such infants are proper subjects of baptism.... ***The Church states the great Bible doctrine that in baptism renewing graces are promised and sealed; and if the adult does not get them, it is his fault.***”  
[Dabney, *Theology*; pg. 779, 781, 793f; emphasis mine]

By this Brother Dabney means the grace received in infant baptism, if somehow undeveloped, is the fault of that individual for not developing the gift. So here is a great theologian, a strong doctrines-of-grace man that denies any saving grace in the waters of baptism. Yet in the act of baptism (in particular the baptizing of infants) there is a covenant seal established. I do not want to say too much lest I be construed as putting words into his mouth and building a straw-man; but infant baptism to Dabney is more than an outward sign.

Another giant among Reformed theologians is **Louis Berkhof**. He too stands against the errors of baptismal regeneration and taught the doctrines of grace. Yet as Dabney, he stumbled over infant baptism:

“Since baptism is not merely a sign and a seal, but also a means of grace, the question arises as to

the nature of the grace wrought by it. This question is raised here only with respect to adult baptism. In view of the fact that according to our Reformed conception, this baptism presupposes regeneration, faith, conversion, and justification, these surely are not to be conceived as wrought by it. In this respect we differ from the Church of Rome. Even the Lutherans, who ascribe greater power to baptism as a means of grace than the Reformed do, agree with the latter on this point. Neither does baptism work a special sacramental grace, consisting in this that the recipient is implanted into the body of Jesus Christ. The believer's incorporation into mystical union with Christ is also presupposed.... ***But baptism is more than a sign and a seal; it is as such also a means of grace. According to Reformed theology it is not, as the Roman Catholics claim, the means of initiating the work of grace in the heart, but it is a means for the strengthening of it or, as it is often expressed, for the increase of grace....*** [referring now to infant baptism:] (1) ***It is possible to proceed on the assumption (not the certain knowledge) that the children offered for baptism are regenerated and are therefore in possession of the semen fidei (the seed of faith); and to hold that God through baptism in some mystical way, which we do not understand, strengthens this seed of faith in the child.*** (2) Attention may also be called to the fact that the operation of baptism as a means of grace is not necessarily limited to the moment of its administration any more than that of the Lord's Supper is limited to the time of its celebration. It may in that very moment serve in some mysterious way to increase the grace of God in the heart, if present, but may also be instrumental in augmenting faith later on, when the significance of baptism is clearly understood. This is clearly taught in both the Belgic and the Westminster Confession. (3) Again, it may be pointed out, as has been done by some theologians (e.g. Dabney and Vos) that infant baptism is also a means of grace for the parents who present their child for baptism. It serves to strengthen their faith in the promises of God, to work in them the assurance that the child for whom they stand sponsors has a right of property in the covenant of grace, and to strengthen in them the sense of responsibility for the Christian education of their child." [Berkhof, *Theology*; pg. 632, 641f; emphasis mine]

Other authors may be quoted which basically state the same as Brother Dabney and Brother Berkhof. These are great leaders who stand for the Scripture yet falter at this point. Is baptism entirely symbolic in nature? Does any spiritual grace flow through the waters of baptism? If symbolic only, then what is the merit of baptizing infants? Are the infants lost without this water baptism, meaning those infants dying without baptism are not in heaven? Is the infant now secured a place in heaven if that infant should die after being baptized? If that is so then water baptism cannot be symbolic only since some spiritual benefit is derived by the infant in the act of baptism. This must be due to the merits of baptism itself, the merits of the church or the administrator, or the merits of the faith of the parents for the infant has no faith.

And yet many who would baptize such infants deny any of the saving powers to those who are capable of believing on their own. Therefore salvation for the infant is somehow connected to water baptism but is entirely by grace through faith for those not an infant. This is an undeniable inconsistency. ***I would charge therefore any who baptize infants has no standing by which to argue against baptismal regeneration.*** I hope this is not an over-statement and I realize the reformed would deny such a charge, but I see no alternative.

Enough has been written about this topic and we must go on. But while not a major part of this thesis, I would suggest for consistency's sake that those rejecting baptismal regeneration should reject infant baptism as well. The two doctrines are so inter-related they both stand or fall together.

**ARE ALL THOSE WHO TEACH BAPTISMAL REGENERATION LOST?** — One final controversial question prior to closing our discussion on baptism and salvation. The question is this: “*Can we categorically say that everyone who believes they are going to heaven because they have been baptized are really not saved at all?*” There was a time when my answer to that would have been an unqualified, “*Yes, those trusting in their baptism to save them is trusting in a ‘works-salvation’ and are not truly born again.*” But that was when I was young in the faith. Hopefully some maturity has come with age.

Life is too complex for simple answers to questions like this. As I have taught throughout this entire book, anyone who in their heart recognizes themselves as a sinner, guilty before a holy God, without hope or merit to earn forgiveness ... anyone in that state who truly repents from their sin and places their trust in Jesus Christ's work on the cross, believing He arose from the dead and is now the living Savior in heaven ... anyone doing that *with all their heart* is truly born again. They are forgiven regardless of race, nationality, gender, denomination, age, status in life or past sins. They have passed from spiritual death into life and belong to the family of God. Their sins are “*washed in the blood of Christ*” (meaning judicially they are given the righteousness of Christ), the Lord gives them the Holy Spirit as a guide and empowerment to the Christian life, and they are on their way to heaven.

Now suppose after their salvation experience they are taught they must be baptized to go to heaven. Perhaps their entire family is part of a denomination that teaches this error or perhaps they have close friends with whom they seek spiritual counsel who believe in baptismal regeneration. After being shown verses “proving” baptism is required to go to heaven, the one who has recently trusted Christ for their salvation submits to this teaching, is baptized and becomes a member of that group teaching baptismal regeneration. Is that person saved? Of course they are, based on the merits of Christ's death. That person may go through life thinking it was their baptism that saved them but that does not annul the initial act of faith in Christ. Perhaps even in time the Lord will lead them out of the group and into a church teaching grace. Then again, for reasons known only to Himself, perhaps the Lord will allow that person to remain in such a group. Is that an impossible scenario?

Why do I even entertain the thought of those depending on something other than the finished work of Christ as possibly being saved? I admit this as a possibility because I have read and studied material by godly men who stumble when explaining the effect baptism had in their salvation. If one teaches those believing baptism was necessary for their salvation cannot be saved, then several who demand the respect of Christianity would be set aside.

One such example would be **C. S. Lewis**, considered by many to be one of the greatest Christian authors and apologists in the last century. In his apologetic writing “The Case for Christianity,” Lewis takes his prior experiences as an atheist to show the futility of atheism and to defend the Christian faith. The work is excellent and theologically sound *until you get to the last chapter when he brings in his baptism and communion!*

“There are three things that spread the Christ life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names — Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord's Supper.... My Methodist friend would like me to say a lot more about belief and a lot less (in proportion) about the other two. But I'm not going into that. Anyone who professes to teach you

Christian doctrine will, in fact, tell you to use all three, and that's good enough for our present purpose." [Lewis, *Case for Christianity*; pg. 52]

In the last chapter of his book Lewis gives much greater weight to the work of baptism in salvation than I believe proper. Yet the rest of the book is entirely sound and spiritually enlightening. Time and again evidence is given the author really knows the Lord and is speaking of real-life experiences when he speaks of the spiritual. How are we to combine that with his Anglican beliefs? Are we to reject the works of C. S. Lewis as one who never experienced the saving grace of God?

Another such example is **R. C. H. Lenski**, a conservative Lutheran expositor with a twelve volume commentary on the Scriptures. He is well known and recommended among commentators for his handling of the Greek. In his commentary on Mark 16:16 he makes an observation which is not unusual for a Lutheran:

"Faith and baptism are combined here as the means of obtaining salvation.... For anyone who comes to faith baptism is the great means of grace, i.e., the channel by which forgiveness, life, and salvation are bestowed upon him." [Lenski, *Mark*; pg. 766f]

His baptismal regeneration interpretation is typical of Lutheran theology and is not why I bring his comments to our attention. The reason I point this out is because as he continues his commentary on Mark 16:16, he admits salvation may be obtained *without baptism*:

"To disbelieve the gospel is thus in itself decisive for condemnation. *Yet the omission of baptism in this statement leaves open another possibility, namely that one comes to faith, desires baptism, but is overtaken by death before he is able to receive the sacrament. This case is plain: not the lack of baptism but its rejection is fatal. This man is saved by the Word alone.* Cases such as this will naturally be very rare." [Lenski, *Mark*; pg. 767f; emphasis mine]

What a unique position for one believing in baptismal regeneration! (or might it be said, "*What an honest confession for one believing in baptismal regeneration!*") On the one hand he teaches grace is communicated through the waters of baptism; but then conditions his previous comments by teaching faith alone can save if one wants to be baptized but is not able prior to his death. Although Lenski gives more intrinsic saving powers to water baptism than would I, at least in his comments here, all he is saying in essence is all I have been trying to teach throughout this thesis: ***water baptism will not save, but anyone who is saved will naturally want to follow Christ in the waters of baptism.*** The bottom line at least in this instance is there is actually very little difference between R. C. H. Lenski and myself.

Are we to reject the writings of Lenski as one unsaved due to his denomination? His writings come highly recommended but how is such spiritual insight possible if he is not a true believer? Unbelievers may learn facts and have a head-knowledge about many things biblically but true spiritual insight comes from walking with the Lord. An unsaved person cannot duplicate those spiritual insights.

Easily others may be added. What about **Augustine**? There are several issues of which we might differ including baptismal regeneration. Indeed, his writings are among those given by the Roman Catholic church to substantiate their errors. But do we cast Augustine aside for these errors? What about **John Wycliffe**? He is remembered for his desire to put the Scriptures into the hands of the average man yet

remained a Catholic priest until his death. Granted, in his later years he wrote articles against transubstantiation (the Catholic mass) and Rome did excommunicate him after his death, but he died as a Roman Catholic. Are we to reject the Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” because he died embracing some errors of Catholicism? What about **William Tyndale**? As a Catholic priest he too desired to put the scriptures into the hands of the common people and was martyred for his faith. But that faith originated within the walls of the Catholic church. What about the great **Martin Luther**, another Catholic priest who died without ever having rejected the Catholic Church (Luther always tried to change the church from within; it was others who built on his work to form the Lutheran denomination). He never rejected baptismal regeneration, bringing it with him in a modified form from the Catholic church and it is included even today in the Lutheran Church, as evidenced by Lenski’s quote above. What about **R. C. Ryle**? He was an Anglican who never rejected baptismal regeneration yet his writings are highly recommended and he was a close friend of C. H. Spurgeon. And the list could go on. Are we to reject all of these giants of history because of their doctrinal errors? Have they not shown forth evidence of truly knowing the Lord?

One objection I have heard to these statements is this: “*The Lord would not allow a true Christian to enter into errors such as baptismal regeneration.*” To that I respond, who are we to dictate to God? Do we know all of God’s workings and providential care? Are we to just cast aside anyone who is an Anglican? ... a Lutheran? ... a Pentecostal? ... a Dunkard? — just because of their denomination? To remain consistent, one would also need to reject paedobaptists as well (see the previous section). Do we therefore also cast out Presbyterians? ... Methodists? ... Reformed Theologians?

Have you never met a godly individual to whom your spirit bore witness with his that he was a true brother-in-Christ yet he was confused theologically, perhaps even in the matter of salvation? If we are to follow that line of thought to its logical end, are we to reject anyone who does not believe in eternal security? — is not “holding on” merely a modified form of works for salvation? What about someone who believes you must speak in tongues as evidence of salvation, are they all lost too? As the old joke goes, if we take this far enough no one would be saved except me and you ... *and I wonder about you!* But thankfully the Lord does not demand doctrinal purity as a qualification for entrance into heaven.

Is this an attempt to justify their teachings? — no, of course not. I have spent years studying this subject and taken great effort to consolidate what I have learned into book form. I have no tolerance for the teaching but I do have great grace towards those who may be caught up in something due to ignorance. One of my goals with this book is to hopefully lead some out of the baptismal regeneration error by showing what the Scriptures teach concerning baptism and salvation.

This is a difficult area and I realize there are those reading this who believe I am on dangerous ground. Without doubt I am. To clarify my understanding towards this matter therefore, follow with me through a series of points, some of which may appear paradoxical:

- ***No one is anyone else’s final judge in the matter of salvation.*** I do not believe anyone reading this would argue with that statement but the best place to begin is to remind ourselves that we are not God.

There should definitely be a difference between a person who is truly born again and someone who is not, and the Scriptures give abundant testimony of how a true believer is to act. But since salvation is entirely spiritual and inward, ultimately no one really knows who belongs to the Lord until that final day in heaven. As has been said by others, *we will all be surprised as to who is in heaven as well as who is absent!* In every church there are those who are what we would call good

people, ones who we would never have thought did not have a true saving relationship with the Lord, *but being a moral person is not the same as having one's sins forgiven*. On the other side of the coin, while salvation brings an immediate change inwardly, outwardly there are changes of which even a lifetime is not enough time to accomplish. There are always areas of growth and unfortunately there are times when the progress is not as evident as we would wish. *Remember: if we had been present the night Peter rejected Christ, we would have not accepted him as truly saved either!* This is therefore our final resting place: *"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."* (2 Timothy 2:19)

- ***No one is knowledgeable enough to fully understand the providential workings of God.*** As touched upon above, the Lord works in ways we do not understand. It would be unwise therefore to make sweeping judgements as to how the Lord would work and how He would not. If I were God, after I saved someone I would lead that person to a Bible-believing church and there would be continual progressive spiritual growth in that individual. In fact, all churches on earth would be alike doctrinally because I would keep my children from all error to ensure the best possible spiritual growth. But obviously the Lord does not work in that manner. I do not understand why but I know His ways are right and holy and my ways are short-sighted. It is here again we let God be God and submit to our humble positions as His finite servants.

- ***God is able to work in any circumstance to bring His own unto Himself.*** As we know from the Scripture as well as personal experience, the Lord is able to bring those whom He wills unto Himself regardless of circumstances. I can remember prior to my salvation many times when a Christian must have surely walked away from my smart-aleck remarks thinking they had been a terrible witness to me. What they could not see however is how their few comments would burn in my heart as the Lord would work in my conscience to bring me unto Himself.

Applying that to the unsaved in even the worse church doctrinally, if the Lord would be so pleased, He is able to take things read from the Scripture or comments made that will burn in the conscience of the lost. Great errors may attend the reading of His word but the Holy Spirit is able to take what is good and do His work. This is not to minimize the effect of error, rather this is relegating to the Holy Spirit the ability to work and glorify the Lord even in less-than-perfect circumstances. *In fact, as we consider the frailty and inconsistencies of all believers and all churches, is it not a wonder anyone is ever saved?*

- ***There is a very real sense in which the work of God is hindered to the degree of doctrinal error.*** I must balance the previous comment by immediately adding an apparently contradictory statement. While it is admitted the Holy Spirit may work in any circumstance, and while God is sovereign in all areas including the salvation of sinners, there is a very real sense in which the work of God is hindered by doctrinal error. Pertaining to the responsibility of man therefore, we as believers are to strive to be doctrinally correct. Areas of teaching which are not aligned with the Word of God are to be rejected. If doctrinal truth did not matter, then a majority of the New Testament would not exist for much of the apostolic writings were written to correct errors. Yes, God is sovereign and yes, He is able to work in any circumstance. But it is also true He is hindered

in His work to the degree of which the truth is mixed with error.

Applying that to our discussion: *to teach baptismal regeneration instead of salvation by grace through repentance and faith is to actually hinder the entrance of souls into the kingdom of God.* I cannot state it more plainly than that.

● ***Head knowledge is not enough to have forgiveness of sins.*** Another item I want to clarify is this: *just because one has a head knowledge of the word of God does not mean they are truly saved.*

I mentioned a few names who are well-known in Christian circles and I believe all of those men were truly saved by the grace of God. But belonging to a Christian organization, teaching or even writing in the name of Christ does not necessarily indicate a true forgiveness of sins. Many may have performed the outward requirements for joining any church without possessing the inward spiritual reality. The names I chose were chosen because their writings indicate a true spiritual fervor and truths taught by the Spirit of God, something which cannot be received by a head-knowledge of Christ alone. Others could have been added to the list who are in error in some manner yet present credible evidence of belonging to God. But another list could have been given as well: a list of those who can repeat Bible facts and stand for their denomination yet give no evidence of spirituality. It must be repeated: *understanding facts about Christ is not enough.*

● ***Admitting some who believe baptismal regeneration may actually have saving faith is not to pacify one who believes baptismal regeneration.*** The final paragraph of this section may serve as a warning to those trusting in their baptism for forgiveness of sins. To place an unscriptural emphasis upon baptism allows a lost person to believe there is something one can do to become pleasing to God. That thought is natural to the heart of man and leads to a salvation by works. Such salvation is impossible. The emphasis is the work of Jesus Christ, not what we do. I close this section with an earnest plea to any who might believe they are going to heaven because of their baptism:

*The gospel message is repent and put your entire faith in the finished work of Christ alone for salvation. It is therefore a dangerous thing to place anything alongside the cross as a means of salvation. If you believe you have been saved by your baptism, the plea of the Scriptures is to search your heart to make sure your relationship with Jesus is real and alive. The proper emphasis found in the New Testament is spiritual and inward. To be saved you must first recognize yourself as a sinner, incapable of spiritually pleasing God in any form (even by joining a church or by being baptized). You must see the death and resurrection of Christ as your sole hope for eternity. You must bow your knees to Christ as Lord, submit to His authority and turn from your self-willed life. If you do this, the Holy Spirit will enable you to live a life pleasing to the Lord. Then find a church that teaches salvation by grace alone. Get out of the fellowship of those who teach you are saved by your baptism. Come to Christ alone for salvation today.*

## *practical applications concerning baptism ...*

**BIBLE INTERPRETATION INVOLVES THE ENTIRE BIBLE** — One of the first things we saw in this study is how easy it is to take a few verses and string them together to teach an entire doctrine. The same error is behind believing one may lose their salvation or the continuance of the charismatic gifts or the denial of the Trinity or many such teachings. In fact, might it be stated all doctrinal error is the failure to properly reconcile the Bible as a whole?

It is worth repeating the principles learned in the beginning of this book. Proper interpretation involves the understanding that all Scripture is truth and does not contradict. Along with that is all Scripture is to be taken literally unless there is justification to believe it is not literal.

I am not trying to set myself up as anyone special or as one having received anything unique in the area of spiritual truth. No one is totally free from error. We all need to pray and study the Word, submitting to the Lord as our hearts are opened. But I do believe through the years the Lord has given me the answer to the baptismal regeneration question. Not that my understanding is perfect; even though I firmly believe the responses given to the verses above, there are still difficulties which could require further explanation (in my own mind of all the verses listed above, there are still unanswered questions concerning First Peter chapter three, although those questions would not affect my understanding of baptismal regeneration).

The Word of God is the greatest gift to man on earth today. What a blessing and honor even to have His word! Let us all commit ourselves anew to studying and obeying what He has given for our benefit.

**TRUE BELIEVERS SHOULD BE BAPTIZED** — Baptism was so united with salvation that some erroneously believe baptism is a requirement to go to heaven. While we have disproved that connection, let us not miss the obvious: *all believers should be baptized!*

It might be mistakenly stated that because of this writing the author has a low view of baptism. That would be incorrect. As has been stated several times throughout this book, salvation is purely based on the merits of the work of the Son of God on our behalf, received by repentance and faith. But after having done that, one of the first acts of obedience a true believer might do is to find an assembly of other believers who preach the truth and be scripturally baptized. A believer being united with the correct church is one of the most important things that ever could be done in regards to that person's spiritual growth.

If one is reading this book and has been converted as described in the Scriptures, might I admonish you to be baptized in a scriptural fashion. It is not enough to say you were baptized as an infant. As we have mentioned, whatever that act was as an infant, it was not scriptural baptism. It is also not enough to say since

baptism is not part of the salvation experience, therefore baptism is not important. That is equally an error and goes against the entire New Testament teaching of baptism.

If you have truly repented from your sins and placed your faith in Christ, then the next thing to do is be baptized. Do not hesitate.

“Another practical lesson is that *our baptism is important*. It identifies us with Christ and gives witness that we have broken with the old life (see 1 Peter 4:14) and will, by His help, live a new life. The act of baptism is a pledge to God that we shall obey Him. To use Peter’s illustration, we are agreeing to the terms of a contract. ***To take baptism lightly is to sin against God. Some people make too much of baptism by teaching that it is a means of salvation, while others minimize it. Both are wrong. If a believer is to have a good conscience, he must obey God.***” [Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*; vol. 2 pg. 418; italic emphasis his; bold / italic emphasis mine]

**ONLY BELIEVERS SHOULD BE BAPTIZED** — The proper order of events is for an individual to make an intelligent decision to repent from their sins and place their faith in Christ alone for salvation, and then to be baptized. I say intelligent decision not in the sense that it is the smart thing to do, even though it is the smart thing to do. But scriptural faith is not a matter of intelligence; even the smartest of men may stumble over simple faith in Christ. Faith is a moral issue, not an intelligence issue. So when I say it is an intelligent decision, I mean there must be understanding on the part of the individual. That eliminates infants and those lacking the natural ability to reason because of a mental disorder or deficiency.

The Scripture always places faith prior to baptism, as mentioned several times throughout this book (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; et. al.). While Peter’s comments in his first epistle are difficult, one thing is clear: either our baptism is an answer of a good conscience to God, meaning by being baptized we are fulfilling a commandment given by God; or during our baptism the important thing is not the act of baptism but our statement of faith that we have trusted Christ given by a pure conscience (1 Peter 3:20,21). Either interpretation demands a rational decision on the part of the one being baptized. The teaching of Scripture places faith prior to baptism, therefore only believers are to be baptized.

**TRUE FAITH IN CHRIST BRINGS OBEDIENCE IN THE BELIEVER** — One of the difficulties with the understanding of our controversial verses is due to the fact that baptism was often united with faith in Christ. This uniting of the two items, salvation and baptism, is possible because a true believer in Christ will want to be baptized. Since baptism is an act of obedience, it was united with salvation because it was natural to expect obedience from a new believer.

As we study the scripture we see it is impossible to separate several issues in salvation. For one, it is impossible to accept Jesus as Saviour without accepting Him also as Lord. It is also impossible to place one’s faith in Christ without properly repenting from sin. What these teachings unite is that as sinners we live in rebellion to a holy God. As we properly understand who Jesus is and our lost condition before God, we repent from our sins and submit to Christ as Lord and Master. Having returned to Christ, we now live in obedience to His commands. Admittedly, this obedience is far from perfect. And there is also a growth aspect of this obedience since at the moment of salvation the new believer is ignorant of so many of the demands of Christ. But for every true believer there is a new willingness to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ and this is manifested in a changed life. Therefore works is not a requirement of salvation but is a result of salvation.

Our present discussion substantiates this view of salvation. No place in Scripture is the salvation from the

judicial punishment of our sins isolated. Faith in Christ is so united with baptism that there are groups who teach baptism is required for salvation. In like manner faith in Christ is so united with good works that there are large denominations which teach good works is sufficient to go to heaven. But to misinterpret these teachings is to lose the proper emphasis of the New Testament.

Showing evidence of one's faith was so important to the early church that they considered it all as one inseparable act. One truly saved would be baptized regardless of the cost (or, stated another way, one truly saved would give evidence of that salvation by a life of obedience, beginning with baptism). Douglas Moo in his worthy commentary on Romans makes the same argument in this manner:

“[T]he early church conceived of faith, the gift of the Spirit, and water baptism as components of one unified experience, which [might be called] ‘conversion-initiation.’ Just as Faith is always assumed to lead to baptism, so baptism always assumes faith for its validity. In [Romans chapter six] vv. 3-4, then, we can assume that baptism stands for the whole conversion-initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit. What, we might ask, of the Christian who has not been baptized? While Paul never dealt with this question — and his first reaction would undoubtedly have been ‘Why hasn’t he been baptized?’ — we must assume from the fact that faith is emblazoned in every chapter of Romans while baptism is mentioned in only two verses that genuine faith, even if it has not been ‘sealed’ in baptism, is sufficient for salvation.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 366]

Other commentators make the same observation:

“The close connection of baptism with repentance should not surprise us, however, for the NT always assumes that a true Christian will obey his Lord and be baptized.” [Kent, *Acts*; pg. 34]

“Belief and baptism are so closely associated that they are conceived of as virtually a single act. The inward reception (belief) is immediately followed by the external act or witness to that faith (baptism). The result is salvation.” [Wessel, *Mark*; commentary on CD ROM]

**BAPTISM IDENTIFIES ONE WITH CHRIST** — Some understand the formula “*baptized into Christ*” as equivalent to mean “*baptized with reference to Christ*,” reflecting a Jewish idiom and being the same as “*baptized into the name of Christ*.” Understanding the usage in this manner, Paul’s argument in First Corinthians 1:13, 15 gains in significance: “*baptized into the name of Paul / my name*” would cause divisions by each group claiming to “*belonging to*” the leader of its choice. Paul reminds his own group they were never baptized “*into his name*” so as to owe any allegiance to him. Paul’s implication is they were baptized “*into the name of Christ*” so they belong to Him and owe Him their allegiance and love, not any of His messengers!

**BAPTISM PICTURES A FORGIVEN LIFE** — So many of the verses misinterpreted to mean we need to be baptized to go to heaven actually are teaching a wonderful truth which blesses the hearts of all believers: *our sins have been forgiven by the work of Christ on our behalf!* Paul during his testimony in Acts chapter twenty-two uses the picture of a *washing away of our sins*. Titus (referring either to baptism or the Old Testament ritualistic washings) speaks of our salvation as a *washing of regeneration*. If I’m correct in my understanding of Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus in John chapter three, Jesus said our being born again

was pre-figured in the Jewish *ceremonial washings* spoken of throughout the Old Testament. Therefore one of the symbolisms portrayed in baptism is the truth we are forgiven, our sins are gone, our sins have been placed on Christ and we will never be held accountable for the judicial aspects of our sins. Wonderful, wonderful truth.

**BAPTISM PICTURES A LIFE OF HOLINESS** — Paul in Romans chapter six uses baptism as a picture of what happened in our hearts at salvation: we were born sinners but our “*old man*,” our Adamic nature, our sinful nature, was crucified with Christ and we are now living a life of resurrection. The believer is dead to the world, the flesh and the devil. Baptism pictures that we *died* to our old way of life and now *live anew* a life dedicated to our Lord, a life under subjection of a new Master: Jesus Christ. Is that how we are living our Christian life? — under subjection to our new Master, the Lord Jesus? That is what our baptism pictures.

Elsewhere when writing to the Galatians, Paul uses our baptism as a reminder that we have “*put on*” Christ, a picture reminiscent of the child coming of age and putting on the garments of adulthood. We might state it in this manner: we remove our old filthy garments of sin and are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. As those in the theater would “*put on*” their various costumes to portray those characters, so we “*put on*” Christ, i.e. we “*act out His part*” in our everyday life. We obey Him, we live as He would throughout our everyday activities.

Therefore while we are never sinless, a true believer’s life is generally characterized by growth in holiness and obedience to Christ. Baptism reminds us of this truth.

**NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES ARE NOT EQUIVALENT TO ISRAEL** — Another point of emphasis which is misunderstood by some is that New Testament churches are not the replacement and equivalent of Old Testament Israel.

Some theologians equate the nation Israel of the Old Testament with the churches of the New Testament. One of the results of this is to spiritualize much of the Old Testament to make it refer to the church era. Another erroneous result which specifically relates to our discussion is to make baptism the logical extension of circumcision. In essence, as circumcision was a rite required of the nation of Israel and proselytes, baptism is the New Testament equivalent including the baptism of infants.

But the New Testament is not merely an extension of the Old Testament Israel and the church is not Israel. *If circumcision was replaced by baptism, the question arises why Paul did not use that argument in Acts chapter fifteen when the issue of circumcision was raised by Judeaizers. That would have decisively put an end to the argument that Gentiles needed to be circumcised upon becoming a Christian.*

The nation of Israel is still an important factor in the plan of God even though they are still under judgement and spiritually blind. Individual Jews are being saved however and these Jews should join New Testament churches just as Gentiles who profess faith in Christ. But the promises to Israel are not annulled (Romans chapter eleven). The churches of the New Testament is an institution began by Christ Himself while on earth and was never intended to take the place of Israel (Matthew 16:18).

**NEW TESTAMENT BAPTISM BEGINS WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST** — The final item to consider is something which some might consider insignificant. The question arises: when did New Testament baptism begin? The reason for this discussion is some erroneously believe baptism began at Pentecost; therefore anything prior to Pentecost does not enter into the discussion of baptismal regeneration. If for no other reason, this does apparently answer the question of the thief on the cross as well as some others saved

without baptism.

When did Christian baptism begin? It began with the prophet John the Baptist, called of God to baptize and be a forerunner of the coming Messiah. *John's baptism is Christ's baptism!* The significance of John's baptism is so important it is one of the few things mentioned in all four of the gospel records: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34. It had the authority of heaven itself (Matthew 21:23-27). *If the baptism of John the Baptist is not Christian baptism then all of the apostles and even Jesus Christ Himself were never scripturally baptized!* This is inconceivable.

## *epilogue ...*

I know of no better way to close our time together than to ask the God of the Scriptures to bless each who reads this manuscript.

*Heavenly Father, Lord of all creation and Giver of all truth —*

*We do thank and bless Your holy name for all you have given us. Even though we have rebelled and turned away from You, You have continually worked among us and taken care of us in innumerable ways. We thank You for the Scriptures, given to reveal Yourself to us. We thank You for the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, given to open our minds and hearts to Your Word and to bring us unto Yourself. We thank You for Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, given sacrificially for our sins. We do honor and bless His Name for His incarnation, His sinless work on earth, His sacrificial death on the cruel cross, and His glorious bodily resurrection from the grave. We thank You that because of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit applying that work to our hearts, we no longer have to fear death and judgement but are freely forgiven. We praise You for that.*

*We recognize our existence and the whole reality of earth is for the honor and glory of Your Son, our Lord Jesus. We long for the day when this sinful rebellion will be over, when You will give all things to Your Son in completion and He will reign forever over this universe. We long for His return. We long to be free from our sinful selves, free to worship You with a pure and whole heart. We thank You that one day this will come to pass.*

*I ask now specifically for this little book. I of all people am aware of its shortcomings but I do ask that you bless this work to Your Name. I ask that you bless the reader and use these writings in that person's life.*

*Father, many may be reading this who are already aware that baptism is not required to go to heaven. I ask that you use this work to perhaps supplement that person's knowledge, that there may be things within this book that will strengthen that person's arguments against those who mistakenly teach baptismal regeneration. Help that person to grow in the knowledge of Your Word. Use this book in their hands. Use them to teach others.*

*Father, without doubt there are also those reading this who have been taught baptism is required to go to heaven. Perhaps at this point they are confused over what they have read and how that reconciles with what they have been taught. Perhaps they have read this book in anger and resentment, disagreeing with the contents. I ask that as it pleases You, You will open their minds and hearts to what has been presented, that they will see the truth set forth herein, and will acknowledge that the scriptures as a whole can only be reconciled by rejecting baptismal regeneration. Scatter their arguments. Help them to see how the proof texts for baptismal regeneration are imaginary structures, unable to support the weight of scrutiny. Help them to understand in their own hearts that their salvation does not depend upon anyone else nor of any*

*action of their own selves, be it their own good works, their church membership or their baptism. Help them to rely solely upon the work of Christ on the cross for their salvation. Help them to search their hearts. Give them understanding of their own spiritual condition. If they truly have not trusted Christ alone for their salvation and are lost, I ask that You bring them unto Yourself and save them. I ask that you then give them boldness to do what they have to do, to leave the assembly of those teaching this error and to unite with those teaching the truth. Use them to glorify Your name according to Your Word. Bless their lives by bringing them to a knowledge of the truth.*

*I ask as it pleases You that You will use this book for the glory of Christ. If anything set forth in this book blesses the life of the reader, help that reader to see and understand Your hand in all of this and help them to glorify You for Your working in their life.*

*We ask these things in the authority of Your Son and for His glory.*

*Amen.*

## *appendix a ...*

The New Testament evidence supporting repentance and faith as the criteria for salvation is overwhelming. What follows is a list of New Testament verses which support either salvation by grace through faith and / or repentance, our sins being “*washed*” in the blood of Christ, someone being saved prior to baptism, or the new birth. Each verse is kept in context and the verses where faith is a matter of sanctification but not salvation (justification) are not included. Also note many “famous” salvation verses are not included. While there are many verses which speak of Christ dying for our sins, most of those verses could just as easily be used by the baptismal regeneration people to support their claim: “*Jesus died for our sins, all we need to do is believe and be baptized.*” Therefore what follows is further evidence baptism is not a requirement to go to heaven:

*“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matthew 4:17)

*“And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.”* (Matthew 9:2-7; parallel passages Mark 2:5-12; Luke 5:20-24)

*“But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* (Matthew 9:13)

*“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”* (Matthew 11:21)

*“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”* (Matthew 28:18-20; see below for further comments on this verse)

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”* (Mark 1:15)

*“Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”* (Luke 7:47-50)

*“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3; also Luke 13:5)*

*“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:1-10)*

*“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42,43)*

*“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” (John 1:12)*

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou?” (John 1:50)*

*“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:15)*

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)*

*“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.” (John 3:18)*

*“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.” (John 3:36)*

*“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman.” (John 4:39)*

*“And many more believed because of his own word” (John 4:41)*

*“Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (John 4:42)*

*“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.” (John 5:24)*

*“This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” (John 6:29)*

*“What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee?” (John 6:30)*

*“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)*

*“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not” (John 6:36)*

*“And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)*

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

*“But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.” (John 6:64)*

*“And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:69)*

*“For neither did his brethren believe in him.” (John 7:5)*

*“And many of the people believed on him” (John 7:31)*

*“He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38)*

*“Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” (John 7:48)*

*“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24)*

*“As he spake these words, many believed on him.” (John 8:30)*

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him” (John 8:31)*

*“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” (John 9:35)*

*“He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” (John 9:36)*

*“And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.” (John 9:38)*

*“Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.” (John 10:25)*

*“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.” (John 10:26)*

*“And many believed on him there.” (John 10:42)*

*“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25)*

*“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:26)*

*“She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” (John 11:27)*

*“That they may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 11:42)*

*“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” (John 11:45)*

*“If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him” (John 11:48)*

*“Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.” (John 12:11)*

*“While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.”* (John 12:36)

*“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him”* (John 12:37)

*“Therefore they could not believe”* (John 12:39)

*“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him”* (John 12:42)

*“He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.”* (John 12:44)

*“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.”* (John 12:46)

*“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not”* (John 12:47)

*“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?”* (John 14:10)

*“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”* (John 14:11)

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me”* (John 14:12)

*“And they have believed that thou didst send me.”* (John 17:8)

*“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”* (John 20:29)

*“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.”* (John 20:31)

*“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Acts 2:21)

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”* (Acts 3:19)

*“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”* (Acts 4:4)

*“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 Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”* (Acts 5:30-32)

*“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done... Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy*

wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” (Acts 8:12,13,17-24; note Peter questioned Simon’s salvation experience even after his baptism)

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

“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? 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 11:17,18)

“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)

“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.” (Acts 13:48)

“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.” (Acts 15:7-9)

“Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1)

“And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.... And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” (Acts 16:30,31,34)

“Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.” (Acts 17:3,4)

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30)

“And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.” (Acts 19:17,18)

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:20,21)

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)

“And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out

*of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” (Acts 28:23,24)*

*“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:7)*

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)*

*“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Romans 2:4)*

*“For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Romans 3:3)*

*“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:22a)*

*“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25a)*

*“The justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26b)*

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28)*

*“Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Romans 3:30)*

*“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3b)*

*“But believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5)*

*“For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness” (Romans 4:9b)*

*“Righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11b)*

*“Who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham” (Romans 4:12b)*

*“Through the righteousness of faith” (Romans 4:13c)*

*“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” (Romans 4:16)*

*“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.” (Romans 4:24)*

*“Therefore being justified by faith” (Romans 5:1a)*

*“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2a)*

*“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29,30)*

*“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.” (Romans 9:30-32)*

*“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Romans 10:4)*

*“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:8-13)*

*“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” (Romans 11:6)*

*“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? 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.” (1 Corinthians 1:11-18)*

*“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:21)*

*“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.” (1 Corinthians 4:15)*

*“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” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)*

*“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16)*

*“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:2)*

*“He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:5)*

*“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (Galatians 3:6)*

*“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” (Galatians 3:7)*

*“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith” (Galatians 3:8a)*

*“So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” (Galatians 3:9)*

*“But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.” (Galatians 3:11)*

*“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 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.” (Galatians 3:22)*

*“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)*

*“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26)*

*“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (Galatians 5:6)*

*“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.” (Ephesians 1:12)*

*“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” (Ephesians 1:13)*

*“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus” (Ephesians 1:15a)*

*“And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power” (Ephesians 1:19)*

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)*

*“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:17)*

*“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29)*

*“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” (Philippians 3:9)*

*“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

*“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that*

*believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-10)

*“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14)

*“For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.”* (1 Timothy 4:10)

*“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: 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.”* (2 Timothy 1:12)

*“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth”* (2 Timothy 2:25)

*“And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* (2 Timothy 3:15)

*“That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:7)

*“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest”* (Hebrews 4:2,3a)

*“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* (Hebrews 11:6)

*“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.”* (Hebrews 11:7)

*“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”* (Hebrews 11:17-19)

*“By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”* (Hebrews 11:31)

*“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)

*“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.”* (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*“Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you”* (1 Peter 1:9,10)

*“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18,19)*

*“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” (1 Peter 1:23)*

*“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)*

*“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.” (1 John 1:7)*

*“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.” (1 John 5:1)*

*“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4,5)*

*“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:10-12)*

*“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.” (1 John 5:13)*

*“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” (Revelation 1:5)*

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**In some Christian circles it is an accepted teaching that placing one's faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ is not enough to have our sins forgiven. Good as that faith is, it is incomplete until that person submits to baptism. It is in the baptismal waters, it is taught, that their sins are washed away and they are "born again" (regenerated) by God. This teaching is not without support:**

***"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."***

***"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."***

***"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"***

**What are we to say in response to these verses? Is repentance and faith not enough to have our sins forgiven?**

**This book takes a detailed look at the scriptures used to teach that our sins are only cleansed in the waters of baptism. Such questions are also considered as the relationship between the baptizing of infants and baptismal regeneration, and if baptismal regeneration is not a biblical teaching, then can one be saved if they are trusting in their baptism for salvation.**

**Is baptism required to go to heaven? Read and find out.**

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