

# CHRISTIAN RESTORATION ASSOCIATION

## "Baptism: What Does the Bible Say, and Does It Really Matter?"

by Dr. Jack Cottrell



Dr. Jack Cottrell

A seminar presented at the  
Christian Restoration Association  
on May 16,2003

CRA  
7133 Central Parke Blvd  
Mason, OH 45040  
Phone: 513-229-8000  
Web address: [www.thecra.org](http://www.thecra.org)  
E-mail: [thecra@aol.com](mailto:thecra@aol.com)

## BAPTISM: FIRST PRINCIPLES

A right understand of baptism is *IMPORTANT*.

- A. ALL Bible doctrine is important.
- B. The doctrine of SALVATION is especially important.
- C. The crucial question here is this: How is BAPTISM related to salvation?

All doctrine, including baptism, is based on *SCRIPTURE*, not *EXPERIENCE*.

- A. Many attempt to base their doctrine of salvation and their confidence concerning their personal salvation upon their experience (for example, what they perceive to be the presence of the "fruit of the Spirit" in their lives, as in Galatians 6:22-23).
- B. But experience can be ambiguous as to its origin and meaning. See Matt 7:21-23.
- C. The doctrine of baptism cannot be based on non-biblical sources, e.g.:
  - 1. Non-biblical baptisms, such as Essene baptism, or Jewish proselyte baptism.
  - 2. The meaning of the later Latin word, *sacramentum* (from which "sacrament" comes).

Christian baptism began on the Day of *PENTECOST*, as recorded in Acts 2. We cannot base our understanding of baptism on pre-Pentecostal biblical practices.

- A. We cannot draw the meaning of baptism from Old Testament circumcision (see below).
- B. We cannot draw the meaning of baptism from John's baptism. These are not the same.
  - 1. In the NT, those baptized with John's baptism had to be baptized again with Christian baptism.
  - 2. See Acts 2:28-39; 19:1-7.
- C. We cannot draw the meaning of baptism from Jesus' baptism.
- D. This is relevant to the question of the thief on the cross. The baptism required for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit did not exist before the Day of Pentecost, which was about 50 days after the thief died on the cross. Thus the requirement of baptism did not apply to the thief. (Whether he was baptized with John's baptism we do not know, but it is irrelevant to the question of Christian baptism anyway.)

There is only *ONE BAPTISM* for Christians.

- A. A common idea is that we are baptized in the Holy Spirit when we first believe, and are saved at that point; then later we can be baptized in water as a way of confessing and symbolizing what has already happened..
- B. But Ephesians 4:5 clearly tells us that there is just one baptism in Christian experience.
- Q. This one baptism has two sides: spiritual (Spirit baptism) and physical (water baptism), but they occur at the same time as two parts of the ONE baptism. See Hebrews 10:22.
- D. The importance of baptism is shown by the items it is associated with in Ephesians 4:4-6.

There are *THREE* main issues regarding baptism:

- A. Its *subjects* (i.e., adults or infants?).
- B. Its *form* (i.e., immersion or sprinkling?).
- C. Its *meaning* (i.e., for salvation or not?).

VI. Salvation is a *DOUBLE CURE*.

- A. It *mchites forgiveness* or remission of sins, i.e., the taking away of all the guilt and condemnation deserved by our sins. This is accomplished through the blood of Christ.
- B. It includes *being born again*, or regeneration. This is the beginning of the healing of our sin-weakened nature, accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit.

VII. Christian baptism (the one baptism) is the *TIME* when God bestows this double cure.

- A. This is the consistent teaching of the New Testament, as shown in the book, *Baptism: A Biblical Study*.
- B. This was the consistent teaching and practice of Christendom for its first 1500 years, up to and including Martin Luther. The new view, that baptism has no connection with salvation, was introduced by the Swiss reformer Huldreich Zwingli about A.D. 1525. These historical facts are given in the book *Baptism and the Remission of Sins*, chs. 1-2.

VIII. *ONLY GOD* can work the double cure, i.e., take away our guilt and heal our sinful nature.

- A. God alone does this; the only question is, *WHEN* does he do it?
- B. The saving activity that occurs in baptism is not accomplished by the water, and not by the act itself, and not by the baptizer. It is accomplished only by God.

IX. Baptism in the New Testament the *NOT* the same as *CIRCUMCISION* in the Old Testament.

- A. This false idea is based on a false doctrinal system called "covenant theology." This doctrine erroneously teaches that there has been only *ONE COVENANT* since the days of Abraham, and that Christians are still under that covenant. Since God introduced circumcision as the *SIGN* of belonging to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:9-14), it is assumed that after Jesus died God simply replaced circumcision with the unbloody covenant sign of baptism. Baptism is thus assigned the same meaning as circumcision had in the Old Testament, i.e., an outward sign that the one receiving it *ALREADY* belongs to the covenant people. The falsehood here is the notion that Christians are still under the same covenant God made with Abraham. The fact is that this covenant was completely fulfilled when Christ came the first time. We are under a *NEW COVENANT*. See Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20.
- B. There is absolutely *NOTHING* in the New Testament that says baptism is a covenant sign, or a "sign and seal" of anything.
- C. Doesn't Colossians 2:11 connect baptism with circumcision? No, not with *PHYSICAL* circumcision. It connects baptism with the "circumcision made without hands," i.e., the *SPIRITUAL* circumcision of which the prophets spoke (e.g., Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 44:7, 9). The former had no connection with the latter, except as an illustration or an analogy. In New Testament times this spiritual circumcision is definitely connected with baptism; baptism is the *TIME* when it happens.

## QUESTIONS CONCERNING BAPTISM

1. "When the NT relates salvation to baptism, it is referring to spiritual baptism, not water baptism." ANSWER: There is only ONE baptism (Eph 4:5). The ONE event called baptism has an outward, physical side and an inward, spiritual side. See John 3:5; Heb 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21.
2. "But wasn't Cornelius baptized in the Holy Spirit before he was baptized in water (Acts 10:44-48)?" ANSWER: Yes, but this was not a normal conversion. It was a miraculous conversion in order to convince the Jews that God wanted the Gentiles to be saved, too. Its only parallel was Pentecost itself (Acts 11:15).
3. "Jesus saves, not baptism." ANSWER: This is true, but the question is: WHEN does Jesus save? He saves us IN baptism (Col 2:12). See the connection between JESUS and BAPTISM in Acts 8:26-40.
4. "The NT consistently teaches that we are saved by FAITH ALONE (e.g., John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 3:28)." ANSWER:
  - A. It is true that faith is THE necessary MEANS by which the sinner receives salvation; he receives it BY faith. But the word "by" does not necessarily imply "as soon as." Faith is the means, but baptism is the TIME when salvation is received. See Col 2:12, "IN baptism."
  - B. We cannot isolate the "saved by faith" passages from other passages that specify other conditions for salvation, e.g., repentance (Acts 2:38) and confession (Rom 10:9-10). We do not have the WHOLE picture as to how salvation is received until ALL such passages, including ones on baptism, are brought together.
5. "Salvation is by grace through faith and NOT by works (Rom 11:6; Eph 2:8-9). But baptism is a work; therefore it cannot be related to salvation." ANSWER:
  - A. Even faith is a "work" in the sense that it is "something we do" (John 6:28-29), but this is NOT the sense of "work" in Paul's writings. For Paul a "work" is the creature's response to the Creator's LAW (Rom 3:28), NOT the sinner's response to the Redeemer's INSTRUCTION on how to be saved.
  - B. We may fully agree that baptism is a work, but it is GOD'S work, not man's.
6. "How can a physical event have a spiritual result?" ANSWER:
  - A. Baptism is not just a physical event; it has a spiritual side also (Heb 10:22).
  - B. In any case, there is no antithesis between the physical and the spiritual (see John 1:14). God has already accomplished the most spiritual of all events—the atonement—through the physical death of Jesus on a physical cross.
7. "What is the salvation status of the 'pious unimmersed'?" ANSWER:
  - A. From Pentecost onward, God's RULE has been this: he bestows the double cure of grace upon repentant sinners in baptism.

- B. If he has bestowed this gift upon some at other times, it is an exception to the rule, an exception that only he knows about and only he has the right to grant. As a church, our responsibility is to believe and to preach the RULE, not the possible exceptions.
- C. In the Day of Judgment, God will not hold one accountable for a RULE (law) IF he was UNABLE to KNOW it. See Rom 4:15.
1. He will judge everyone according to the principle of "conscientious response to available light." This is the essence of piety.
  2. But once anyone knows the rule, i.e., the true Biblical teaching on baptism, he becomes accountable for following it, believing it, and teaching it.
- D. 

THREE categories of the "pious":	Now in the VISIBLE church	Now in the INVISIBLE church	Later in HEAVEN
Pious <u>immersed</u> in R.M. churches	XXX	XXX	XXX
Pious <u>immersed</u> in other churches		XXX	XXX
Pious <u>unimmersed</u>			XXX

8. "How may we account for the "Christian experience" of those who have never been immersed into Christ? Many who were sprinkled (as infants or adults) have 'felt' saved and Spirit-filled. How do we explain this?" ANSWER:
- A. Matt 7:21-23 teaches us that we dare not use feelings and personal experiences as the basis for assurance.
  - B. Maybe God HAS made an exception to his rule, but only HE knows this for sure.
  - C. What should a "pious unimmersed" person do in this situation?
    1. First, he should accept the truth of God's RULE regarding baptism and salvation.
    2. Second, he should thank God for whatever saving work He has already done for him up to this point.
    3. Finally, he should submit NOW to God's revealed plan for baptism, being immersed into Christ for the remission of his sins.
    4. At the moment of his baptism he should "call upon the name of the Lord" (Acts 22; 16), asking him to do NOW any saving work that he has not already done, leaving it up to God to know what that may be. The prayer should be something like this: "God, THANK you for whatever saving grace you may have already given me. THANK you for giving me a clearer knowledge about baptism. If you have not yet given me any of your blessings promised in baptism, I call upon you now to do so as I submit to your will."

## "LEFT BEHIND": BAPTISM IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The Bible's teaching about baptism got "left behind" as Christian history unfolded. We can pin-point when the changes took place for the (I) meaning, (II) subjects, and (III) form of baptism.

**I. LEFT BEHIND: The Biblical MEANING of Baptism.** (All the quotations given here-and more-can be found and documented in *Baptism and the Remission of Sins: An Historical Perspective*; ed. David Fletcher [Joplin MO: College Press, 1990], chs. 1 & 2 by Jack Cottrell.)

**A. For 1500 years Christendom held fast to the Bible's teaching on the meaning of baptism. Examples:**

1. Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165): New converts "are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated.... For...they then receive the washing with water," as in John 3:5. "We have learned from the apostles this reason" for baptism: "in order that we...may obtain in the water the remission of sins."
2. Tertullian (A.D. 145-220): "Happy is our sacrament of water, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life." "The act of baptism... is carnal, in that we are plunged in water, but the effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from sins."
3. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 315-386): "When going down...into the water, think not of the bare element, but look for salvation by the power of the Holy Ghost."
4. Augustine (A.D.354-430): Baptism "brings salvation." We are "saved by baptism." The "apostolic tradition" teaches the "inherent principle, that without baptism...it is impossible for any man to attain to salvation and everlasting life."
5. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274): It is clear "that all are bound to be baptized: and that without Baptism there is no salvation for men." "Baptism opens the gates of the heavenly kingdom to the baptized in so far as it incorporates them in the [suffering] of Christ, by applying its power to man."
6. Martin Luther (1483-1546): "Through baptism [the sinner] is bathed in the blood of Christ and is cleansed from sins." "Both the forgiveness and the driving out of sins are the work of baptism." "It is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's." "To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save." We "receive in the water the promised salvation."
7. These quotations are not exceptions; they represent the belief of ALL Christendom up to this time.

**B. This view, however, got LEFT BEHIND as the result of the teaching of one man: Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531), the Swiss reformer and predecessor to John Calvin.**

1. "In this matter of baptism-if I may be pardoned for saying it—I can only conclude that all the [teachers] have been in error from the time of the apostles." "Christ himself did not connect salvation with baptism." "The two are not to be connected and used together." "Water-baptism cannot contribute in any way to the washing away of sin." "Baptism is given and received for the sake of fellow-believers, not for a supposed effect in those who receive it."
2. Zwingli said that baptism has no connection with salvation because:
  - a. A physical event cannot have a spiritual result; material stuff (e.g., water) cannot cleanse the soul.
  - b. Only the blood of Christ can remove sin.
  - c. A sovereign God can work salvation whenever he chooses.
  - d. Salvation is by grace, and baptism is a work.
3. Thus Zwingli established the doctrine that salvation is by FAITH ALONE. "Christ himself did not connect salvation with baptism: it is always by faith alone." "The one necessary thing which saves those of us who hear the Gospel is faith." "We are saved by faith only." "If we say baptism takes away sins, that is a figure of speech; for it is not baptism which takes them away, but faith."

4. But what about all the New Testament passages that teach that salvation comes in baptism? These texts are talking about SPIRITUAL baptism only, not water baptism.
5. So what IS the meaning of baptism? It is an outward SYMBOL of our previously-received salvation, an outward SIGN of our membership in the church, and an outward PLEDGE to live the Christian life.

C. Most Protestants have followed this NEW VIEW of Zwingli, rather than the biblical view as it was held for the first 1500 years of the church.

#### H. LEFT BEHIND: The Biblical SUBJECTS of Baptism.

- A. Until about A.D. 200 all the Christian writings about baptism reflect the belief that it applies to believers only.
- B. The New Testament teaching began to be LEFT BEHIND from about the beginning of the third century. In A.D. 205 Tertullian wrote a treatise called "On Baptism," in which he argues AGAINST infant baptism (which shows that it was being practiced by some at that time). He gave three reasons against it:
  1. Children do not need forgiveness. Though they inherit a bias toward sin, they have not actually sinned.
  2. It is better that they understand what is going on in baptism. They should be old enough to know how to ASK for what is given in baptism.
  3. Why should we put the children's sponsors at risk?
- C. But over the next 25 years other writers step forward to defend infant baptism (e.g., Hippolytus, Origen).
  1. The REASON for this change from adult to infant baptism was that at this same time the belief arose that infants inherit some serious effects of sin from Adam.
  2. Since baptism is what takes away the effects of sin, infants must be baptized since they are born with these effects.
- D. Christians disagreed about this until Augustine, who influenced the whole church from then on to believe in a full doctrine of original sin and the absolute necessity of infant baptism to take away original sin. Thus the biblical teaching was LEFT BEHIND.

#### ffl. LEFT BEHIND: The Biblical FORM of Baptism.

- A. The word baptizo means "to immerse," and biblical baptism is immersion.
- B. This began to be LEFT BEHIND quite early, though. A church handbook called "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," or "The Didache" [Did-ah-kay], written about A.D. 150, says (#7):
 

"But concerning baptism, thus shall ye baptize. Having first recited all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living [running] water. But if thou has not living water, then baptize in other water; and if thou are not able in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
- C. The reason for this change: many were postponing their baptism until their deathbed, falsely believing that sins committed after baptism could not be forgiven.
- D. From this time on pouring/sprinkling was accepted along with immersion as an equally valid form of baptism.

## BAPTISM: LAW OR GRACE?

Jack Cottrell

### INTRODUCTION.

- A. Knowing the difference between *law* and *grace* is crucial for a mature and satisfying Christian life.
- B. BOTH law and grace are good and necessary aspects of our lives as Christians.
  - 1. LAW = the rules and commandments God our Creator has given us to obey.
    - a) He gives them to us simply as our Creator and Lawgiver.
    - b) We are expected to obey them~to live by the Creator's law—simply as creatures who want to honor and respect our Lord and Lawgiver.
    - c) Living by law = obeying God's commands, doing good works.
  - 2. GRACE = the plan or method by which God our Redeemer saves us from sin.
    - a) On God's part, grace is a *promise* more than a command. He promises to give us salvation as a *free gift*.
    - b) On our part, grace is simply accepting and receiving the promise, like a helpless & penniless beggar accepts a handout.
  - 3. Grace = what GOD does for us. It is *God's* works. // Law = what WE do for God. It is *our* works.
  - 4. Here is a crucial point: both law and grace belong to the Christian life, *but not in the same way*.
    - a) We are SAVED by GRACE, not by law or law-keeping or works or obedience. See Rom. 6:14.
    - b) We LIVE by LAW, but not in order to be saved thereby.
      - (1) Law (law-keeping, obedience, good works): this is all a necessary part of our lives as Christians, but we are not SAVED by achieving a certain level of performance in relation to commandment-keeping.
      - (2) Trying to be *saved* by law-keeping is true *legalism*; it is a most serious problem that we should try our best to avoid.
- C. Now, how does all this relate to baptism? The question is this: into which category does baptism fall, LAW or GRACE?
  - 1. Our denominational friends long ago decided that baptism belongs in the category of LAW-it is a WORK.
    - a) They are well aware of the distinction between law and grace, and they know that we are not saved by law-keeping or works. Their golden rule is Eph. 2:8-9.
    - b) Because they have concluded that baptism is an act of obedience to a commandment, i.e., a work, they have concluded that it can have nothing to do with salvation.
    - c) What is the purpose of baptism, then? It is a testimony, a confession of faith, a demonstration of faith, an act by which we bear witness to our faith. (Note: these are all actions of MAN, not God.)



- d) This is what we commonly call the "faith-only" approach to salvation. It was begun by H. Zwingli about A.D. 1523 and has been adopted by most Protestant denominations.

How do folks in the Restoration Movement usually respond to this denominational view that baptism is a work of man? By soundly affirming--*baptism is a work of man*

- a) So what is the difference? Well, our denominational friends put baptism in the same category as all the good works of the Christian life, and say we are saved by NONE of these works, including baptism.
- b) Often our reaction is to say yes, baptism IS in the same category as all the good works of the Christian life, and we are saved by ALL of them, including baptism.
- c) What is the problem with our approach? It is a denial of the Biblical doctrine of grace. It makes salvation the result of works, in direct contradiction of Eph. 2:8-9.
- (1) Sometimes this is because we simply do not understand the difference between law and grace as two distinct principles of relating to God. (E.g., we make it simply a matter of OT vs. NT.)
  - (2) The result is that we approach salvation IN GENERAL in terms of law, and then baptism in particular becomes a matter of law, not grace.
- d) Examples of how baptism is made a *work of law* among us.
- (1) The very plan of salvation itself introduces and reinforces the notion of salvation by lawkeeping: Faith, Repentance, Confession, Baptism, and "Living the Christian life" are presented, stair-step fashion, as being *equally significant* in attaining salvation. Baptism is just one of a list of commandments that includes the entire catalogue of Christian good works ("Living the Christian life").
  - (2) We emphasize Rom. 1:5 and James 2:24, with the ulterior motive of proving that baptism is necessary for salvation. The problem is that we cannot LIMIT these passages to baptism; they must refer to ALL the works we are commanded to do. Thus we are saved by works in general, including baptism.
  - (3) We relate baptism to the LORDSHIP of Christ rather than to the REDEMPTION of Christ. I.e., we tell a person that by obeying the commandment of baptism he demonstrates his submission to the Lordship of Christ.
  - (4) We speak of baptism purely in terms of obedience to a command. We call it "the first act of obedience" or (paradoxically) "completing your obedience."
  - (5) We motivate people to be baptized by citing the command or the example of Jesus.
  - (6) We use Zwinglian language to describe baptism: "public testimony," "bearing witness to our faith," "demonstration or expression or confirmation of our faith," "act of commitment," "pledge to live the Christian life," "letting the world know."

You see, the problem here is that we have adopted the basic premise of our denominational friends, that baptism is in the category of "good works." From this we draw vastly different conclusions, however.

- a) Our denominational friends say: *faith-only*.
- b) We tend to say: *works-salvation*.

c) NEITHER OF THESE IS BIBLICAL!

D. Is there a solution to this dilemma? Just one-and I say this to *both* our denominational friends *and* our legalistic brethren: WE MUST STOP THINKING OF BAPTISM AS A "GOOD WORK" DONE BY MAN, AND START THINKING OF IT BIBLICALLY, AS A "GRACE WORK" DONE BY GOD.

E. What follows is the Biblical picture of baptism as a divine work of grace.

I. The Bible clearly distinguishes baptism from the category of the works of man.

A. Most significant is Matt. 28:19-20.

1. Of all the acts of piety that we can do, only BAPTISM is specifically mentioned here.
2. It is mentioned separately, and thus clearly distinguished from "observing all that I commanded you." The latter is the category of good works, and baptism is not one of them!

B. In Mark 16:16 and Gal. 3:26-7, baptism is clearly qualitatively linked with faith, which is indisputably a condition for salvation compatible with grace. See Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:8.

C. In Gal. 3:27, the saving significance of baptism is affirmed in the very context where the LAW-system (salvation by works, especially circumcision) is rejected as a way of salvation, in contrast with the GRACE-system (salvation by faith in God's promises). This same general point is true of Romans 6:3-5, too.

1. In the book of Galatians as a whole and in chapter 3 especially, Paul attacks the idea that a sinner can be saved by works of law, especially the Mosaic law and especially the work of circumcision.
2. But in this very context where salvation by works is condemned, salvation (union with Christ) by baptism is affirmed.
3. This shows that baptism is not to be considered as a work, but as a vital part of the grace-system itself.

D. Titus 3:4-7 MOST clearly distinguishes human works from baptism. We are *not* saved by deeds *we* have done, but by God's mercy, by the WASHING of regeneration and renewing, which are works of God the Holy Spirit. Thus we are justified by GRACE.

E. Col. 2:12 is VERY significant, because when read with its parallel passage in Eph. 2:8-10, it CLEARLY shows that baptism is not meant to be a work of man but an act of grace.

1. The parallel between the contents of these two "prison epistles," and between Eph. 2:1-11 and Col. 2:9-11 especially, is easily recognized and generally accepted.
2. Because they are parallel passages, each supplements the other. Neither passage by itself contains everything on the subject; they must be read together for the TOTAL picture.
3. Eph. 2:8-9 clearly says we are saved by grace through faith, and NOT by works. But Col. 2:12 says that salvation (dying and rising with Christ) occurs *in baptism*. Thus in Paul's mind, baptism must be in the grace-faith category, not the category of good works.
4. See the following comparison and harmony of Eph. 2:1-11 and Col. 2:11-13. The general subject is *how a dead sinner becomes a living Christian*.

		<u>Eph. 2</u>	<u>Col. 2</u>
I. The sinner's lost state			
a) Dead in sins	(verses)	1,5	13~
b) Spiritually uncircumcised		11	13
II. The Christian's saved state			
a) Made alive with Christ		5	13
b) Raised up with Christ		6	12
c) Seated above with Christ		6	(3:1-3)
d) Spiritually circumcised		11	11,13
III. How the transition is made			
a) By God's work		10	12
b) Through faith		8	12
c) BY GRACE		8	
d) IN BAPTISM		**	12

5. In addition to the overall parallel, it is striking that the only element of this picture NOT mentioned in Colossians is *grace*, and the only thing NOT mentioned in Ephesians is *baptism*. Just as surely as grace is assumed in the Colossians passage, so is baptism assumed in Ephesians.

- F. The conclusion is that the Bible does NOT put baptism into the category of good works, but clearly sees it as a gracious act.

## II. The Bible clearly depicts baptism as a *work of God*.

- A. Part of the very meaning of grace is its emphasis on the working of *God*. It consists of and is the product of what GOD does. To be saved by GRACE is to be saved by works of GOD.
1. See Eph. 2:10, "We are His workmanship"; Col. 2:12, "Faith in the working of God."
  2. This is exactly how Scripture describes baptism~as a work of God. Hence it is a matter of grace.
  3. Martin Luther, who folly believed in salvation by grace AND salvation in baptism, was challenged on this point by his Zwinglian friends. "How can you have such a view of baptism?" they asked. "Isn't baptism a work?" Luther's reply was, "Yes, it is true that our works are of no use for salvation. Baptism, however, is not our work but God's." ("Large Catechism," 4:35; see also 4:10 and 4:37; in *The Book of Concord*, Tappert ed., Fortress Press, pp. 437,441).
- B. Everything the Bible says is actually accomplished in baptism is something ONLY GOD CAN DO.
1. - Passages that use the verb *baptidzo*, "to baptize."
    - a) Matt. 28:19. What does it mean to be "baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"? It means that baptism establishes an OWNERSHIP RELATION with God; God acquires/accepts/receives us as His very own.
    - b) Mark 16:16 promises that God will SAVE the one baptized.
    - c) Acts 2:38 makes baptism a condition for REMISSION OF SINS and THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
    - d) Acts 22:16 makes it a condition for WASHING AWAY SINS.
    - e) Rom. 6:3-5 says in baptism we are PUT TO DEATH, BURIED, and RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

- 0 1 Cor. 12:13 says baptism ADDS US TO THE BODY OF CHRIST.
- g) Gal. 3:27 says in baptism we are UNITED WITH CHRIST and ARE CLOTHED WITH CHRIST. h)  
Col. 2:12 says in baptism we are BURIED and RAISED FROM THE DEAD.
2. One passage using the noun *baptismos*, "baptism."  
1 Peter 3:21 says in baptism we are SAVED.
  3. Passages using the term *louo*, "to wash."
    - a) 1 Cor. 6:11 relates it to JUSTIFICATION and SANCTIFICATION.
    - b) Titus 3:5 says it is a washing of REGENERATION and RENEWING, done by the Holy Spirit.
    - c) Eph. 5:26 relates it to SANCTIFICATION and CLEANSING.
  4. One other passage. John 3:5, says it brings the NEW BIRTH.
  5. All of these works associated with baptism are SAVING actions and can be accomplished by GOD ALONE, not by any work of man. Baptism is the *occasion* of these divine works.
  6. The Bible NEVER speaks of baptism as man's response, confession, commitment, expression, testimony, pledge, announcement, confirmation, or demonstration. This is Zwinglian language, not Biblical language.
  7. The only human acts associated with baptism are these:
    - a) Faith. Col. 2:12.
    - b) Prayer. Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21. (In the latter passage, the Greek *eperotema* does NOT mean "pledge" [as in the NIV] or "response." It means "appeal" or "prayer" and echoes Acts 22:16.)
- C. Baptism by its very design is something done TO us, not something WE DO (except in the broadest sense of making a decision, in which sense faith itself is something we do—John 6:29).
1. The physical side of baptism (immersion in water) is something done TO us by someone else—the baptizer.
    - a) The Biblical language is passive: "BE baptized."
    - b) The action is passive: someone else immerses us and raises us up.
      - (1) This is in contrast with non-biblical baptisms, which were usually self-immersions (e.g., Essene baptism, Jewish proselyte baptism).
      - (2) This is in contrast with all acts of obedience to commands or law in the Christian life.
    - c) In baptism we stop doing everything—even breathing.
  2. The spiritual side of baptism (immersion in the Holy Spirit) is something done TO us by someone else—GOD.
    - a) In baptism God is working (Col. 2:12) to apply the benefits of Christ's redeeming work.

- b) Our role is simply to call upon God to keep His promises (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21) and to trust that He will do so (Col. 2:12).

### III. The Bible depicts baptism as having the character of a PROMISE more than a command.

#### A. Grace emphasizes the promises of God, not His commands.

1. Law (God's imperatives to us as *creatures*) takes the form of commands: "Do this; don't do that." These are WORKS.
2. Grace (God's gifts to us as *sinners*) takes the form of promises: "I'll do this; I'll give you that." Accepting what is offered in the promise is NOT a work.

#### B. Baptism has the essence of a gracious promise to the lost sinner, not the essence of a commandment to be obeyed simply out of respect for God's Lordship over us.

1. Baptism is God's promise to GIVE us something. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-9.
2. The lost sinner does not need more commandments; he has already shown his inability to keep the ones he has. (This is why he is a sinner!) What he needs is a PROMISE—a promise of help, a promise of a way out of his predicament, a promise of a way of escape. This is baptism!
3. We MUST begin to think of baptism more as a promise than as a command. When we are baptized, we are responding to God's promise, not simply obeying a command. The latter alone WOULD be a WORK, and WOULD be contrary to grace.
4. The grammatical form may be imperative in places (e.g., Acts 2:38), but the inner essence of baptism is that of a promise. It is like a doctor saying to a sick person, "Take this medicine, and you will get well." It is like a rescuer saying to a drowning man, "Grab this rope!"
5. Both before and after baptism, we should think of it as God's promise to cover us with the blood of Christ and provide us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a great comfort to us as Christians when we begin to doubt our salvation.

### IV. How can we present baptism as grace, not law?

#### A. Don't be timid about using BIBLE language about baptism.

#### B. Stop using ZWINGLIAN language about baptism (i.e., the language that depicts baptism as a human work: testimony, demonstration, etc.).

#### C. Use a more Biblical plan of salvation, one based on a SINGLE passage of Scripture along with its parallel: Ephesians 2:8-10 and Colossians 2:12.

1. We are saved BY grace, THROUGH faith, IN baptism, FOR good works.
2. See J. Cottrell, *His Truth*, ch. 10, for a discussion of this.

BAPTISM AND SOUND HERMENEUTICS  
Jack Cottrell

With reference to the question of the role of baptism in salvation, one thing at stake is sound hermeneutical practice. A basic hermeneutical principle is that ALL the Bible says about a given subject must be considered before we can draw final conclusions about that subject. Examples:

A. The doctrine of God. Here one could focus on passages such as John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8, and conclude that God's nature is entirely and only LOVE.

1. References to wrath would then be assimilated into this picture of a loving God, as being somehow the expressions of his love.

References to eternal punishment in hell would be completely reinterpreted.

3. We rightly protest, however, that such texts as 2 Thes. 1:7-9 and Heb. 12:29 should have been considered in the beginning, along with the texts about love.

B. The doctrine of baptism. A hasty reading of the NT might lead one to believe that Christian baptism is simply a continuation of John's baptism. But once such texts as John 7:37-39 and Acts 19:1ff. are brought into the picture, we see this can no longer be held.

How does this apply to the issue of baptism and salvation?

A. Concerning those of us who believe that baptism is a saving work of God, we are criticized for isolating the NT references to baptism from the broader picture of salvation as presented in the NT.

B. The opposite is actually the case, however. Those who see baptism as a saving work of God are the ONLY ones who take account of the WHOLE NT picture of salvation.

C. Those who reject the idea that baptism is a saving work of God are the ones who are guilty of the unsound hermeneutical practice named above. They have drawn their

conclusions about salvation on the basis of only PART of the NT's teaching on the subject; they have not considered ALL that Scripture has to say about salvation before drawing their final conclusions.

A striking parallel to this is seen in the Evangelical dispute over "Lordship salvation," in which both sides reject any role for baptism in the salvation process.

- A. Those who defend Lordship salvation, led by John MacArthur, say that, in order to be saved, one must not only believe that Jesus is his Savior but also must surrender to Jesus as his Lord. The latter involves repentance and submission to Christ's will and a desire to serve Him.

Others, led by Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie, say this is requiring too much and is equivalent to works salvation. The only thing one must do to be saved is BELIEVE that Jesus is his Savior, period. Cited as proof are such texts as John 3:16; 5:24; Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 John 5:1.

- C. Those who agree with MacArthur will be quick to say, "Now wait a minute! It is not sound hermeneutics to take these texts in isolation from the ones that relate repentance and submission to Christ's Lordship to salvation." Cited are such texts as Luke 6:46-49; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10.
- D. For a good presentation of this criticism, see Millard Erickson, The Evangelical Mind and Heart, p. 120.

The necessity for a further step should be obvious.

- A. The NT also has much to say about the role of BAPTISM in the salvation process. It is just as wrong to exclude these references from the total picture as it is to exclude references to repentance and Lordship. The hermeneutical principle is the same in both cases.
- B. Those who criticize Zane Hodges et al. are inconsistent here. By criticizing Hodges they condemn their own hermenetical error of excluding baptism from the total picture of salvation.

B

**The Evangelical Mind and Heart**  
**Perspectives on Theological and Practical Issues**  
**Millard J. Erickson**

The difficulty appears to stem in part from the fact that the Bible gives different formulas for conversion, different responses to the query, "What must I do to be saved?" Some passages, emphasized by Hodges, specify that faith is necessary for salvation, but make no mention of repentance. Other passages specify repentance, but make no mention of faith. The question is, How are we to interpret and integrate these passages, which ultimately is systematic theology's task? There are various possibilities:

a. We might regard one of the two sets of passages as primary from a hermeneutical standpoint and interpret the other set in that light. This appears to be the technique which Hodges has followed, elevating the passages where only faith is mentioned to a position of normativeness.

b. We might conclude that there are multiple (or at least dual) ways of salvation. One may be saved by faith or by repentance. The method varies with the individual, so that some need to believe and others to repent. Whatever a given individual lacks is what he or she must exercise.

c. We might conclude that both faith and repentance are necessary to salvation. In those biblical passages where only one is mentioned explicitly, the other is implicit. Repentance and faith would then be complementary aspects of a whole—conversion.

The two sets of passages we have in view can be represented symbolically as  $F \supset S$  (i.e., "if faith, then salvation") and  $R \supset S$ . In actuality, the full biblical formula may well be  $RF \supset S$ . In those cases where one or the other component is implicit, the formula would be  $R(F) \supset S$  or  $F(R) \supset S$ . It would be instructive to investigate whether the immediate context, the person(s) involved, or some other factor can account for the emphasis upon faith in some texts and upon repentance in others. While the limitations of space prohibit that endeavor here, my preliminary conclusion is that there is some support for such a hypothesis. In addition, the suggestion that faith and repentance are complementary (c) appears to offer a more adequate and accurate account of the data, and with fewer biblical and theological problems, than do the other two possibilities (a and b). At least on this point, then, MacArthur's approach is to be preferred.



## INFANT BAPTISM

There are TWO approaches to infant baptism, depending on one's understanding of the MEANING of baptism: FOR salvation, or NOT for salvation.

### I. INFANT BAPTISM IS FOR SALVATION.

- A. To believe this, one has to believe these two things:
  - 1. Baptism as such is for salvation.
  - 2. Infants NEED salvation, i.e., they are born in original sin.
- B. Christians believed the former from the beginning. When did they begin believing the latter? About A.D. 200. And this is when infant baptism began!
  - 1. At first (Tertullian and following) the "original sin" included only inherited spiritual sickness (depravity). But some began baptizing infants in order to remove it.
  - 2. From Augustine onward, the full doctrine of original sin was believed (total depravity, guilt). Infant baptism was absolutely necessary to remove i t.
- C. This view continued in the Roman Catholic Church and was retained by Luther and Lutherans.
- D. How do we respond? By showing that infants are NOT born in original sin. Rather, they are born in original grace, under the blood of Christ, and thus do not NEED baptism. They are in a saved state until the age of accountability.
  - 1. Romans 5:12-19
  - 2. Mark 10:14.

### II. INFANT BAPTISM IS NOT FOR SALVATION.

- A. In most churches that baptize infants, infant baptism has NOTHING to do with salvation.
  - 1. Why not? Because they do not believe baptism for for salvation in the first place.
  - 2. So, regardless of what they believe about original sin, they must baptize infants for some other reason.
- B. When did this approach to infant baptism begin? A.D. 1525, with Huldreich Zwingli.
  - 1. He rejected baptism for salvation around 1523; so he had to come up with a new reason for baptism as such, especially infant baptism.
  - 2. His new rationale for infant baptism is as follows:
    - a) There has been only ONE COVENANT from the time of Abraham. The Mosaic Covenant was a temporary expedient.

- b) There has been only ONE COVENANT PEOPLE since then. Israel and Christians are one and the same "church." We become members of this covenant people by physical birth.
- c) There has been only ONE COVENANT SIGN since Abraham: circumcision, replaced by baptism. Baptism has the same meaning as circumcision:
  - (1) A sign of belonging to the covenant people.
  - (2) A pledge (testimony, witness) to the church.

C. How do we respond to this?

1. The New Covenant did not begin to exist until Jesus died on the cross. It is the NEW covenant.
  - a) Whenever NT writers compare covenants, it is always the New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant; and the New Covenant is always described as coming into existence AFTER the Mosaic Covenant.
    - (1) 2 Cor. 3:6, 14.
    - (2) Heb. 8 - 12.
    - (3) Jer 31:31-34, cited in Heb. 8:8-12.
  - b) The New Covenant did not exist prior to the cross. Luke 22:20; Heb. 9:15-17.
2. God made a covenant with Abraham, but it was absorbed into the Mosaic Covenant, forming a two-part covenant composed of promise and law (Gal. 3). The New Covenant is LIKE Abraham's covenant, in that it is a covenant based on PROMISES, but it is not the same as Abraham's covenant. We have different and better promises (see Heb. 8:6).
3. A major difference between the Old Covenant (including Abraham's) and the New Covenant is that membership in the former was by physical birth, and in the latter by spiritual birth.
  - a) See Jer. 31:31-34 again.
  - b) John 1:13; 3:3-5.
  - c) Phil. 3:3.
4. The NT is completely silent about infant baptism.
  - a) What about household baptisms? This refers to adults in the households. See Acts 16:15, 31-34; 1 Cor 1:16; 16:16.
  - b) This silence is all the more significant in view of the Judaizing controversy, which was tearing the early church apart. If baptism is meant to take the place of circumcision, why didn't Paul just explain this to the Judaizers and to the Galatians?
5. Baptism is related to the spiritual circumcision of the OT, but not to physical circumcision. There was never any inherent connection between these. See Col. 2:11-13.