

CHAPTER 4

MYTH 4: BAPTISM IS OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE

4.1 WHY ALL THE FUSS? -- DEFINITIONS

To place anything that God has commanded into the realm of secondary importance is to trivialize it. Baptism is among the clearest and most articulated doctrines in the New Testament. At the same time, there are more alternative teachings with regard to baptism than any other teaching in the denominations. These doctrines have arisen out of Roman Catholic and denominational traditions -- they are not the consequence of ambiguous biblical teaching. (When you complete this chapter you will have read the vast majority of the verses in the New Testament which deal with baptism, and you can determine the validity of this last statement for yourself.)

There was a time when denominations honestly and forthrightly discussed their differences with regard to baptism in an attempt to bring about true unity on this important doctrine. These attempts have largely been abandoned in favor of the teaching which is the title of this chapter. The reason for this is the overwhelming momentum of the inter-denominational efforts which emerged in conjunction with the radio and TV efforts of the 1940's and 1950's, and it continues heavily with this impetus even today. It is impossible for these preachers to take a definitive stand with regard to baptism, since it is impossible for them to baptize "over the air" (in any way). As a result of this, it became most convenient for them to ignore the tremendous number of scriptures which deal with baptism, and to declare that a person was saved by "faith only" or "accepting Jesus as your personal savior."

When confronted with questions regarding baptism most of these religious leaders either state or necessarily imply that baptism is of secondary importance. The popular doctrine is that since you are saved by faith only, baptism is of secondary importance. So we hear: "Go to the church of your choice and be baptized according to the way that they teach you."

If we could find the basis for this quote in the scriptures, we would not question it. However, if scriptural baptism *is* what puts a person into Christ, then we must teach it! We cannot throw away a major teaching of Jesus and the apostles just because it is not convenient to radio and TV preachers. We cannot pick those scriptures that we wish to follow and throw away the rest (Rev. 22:18-19; Mt. 4:4).

With these factors in mind, let us define the terminology that we will use in this chapter. The Greek word for baptism (baptizo) in the New Testament was not translated -- it was transliterated out of the Greek. Baptizo was not a dedicated religious word as baptism is today. It merely meant immersion, and it was applied to the immersion

(typically in water) of anything. It started to be used for religious purposes with the preaching of John the Baptist.

When we state the myth that *baptism is of secondary importance*, we are referring to that baptism which the bible states was commanded of and was practiced by Christians in the first century. (We shall see from the scriptures which will be quoted below that this was baptism in water.)

By *secondary importance*, we mean that the most prevalent and common denominational teaching is to de-emphasize this practice to the point where many now believe that it has virtually nothing to do with salvation.

At this point we will present the biblical teaching. As we have done above, this will be subdivided according to the teachings given in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the book of Acts, and the letters written to the churches (epistles). We plead with you to be patient as we present this to you in the most logical way that we can.

4.2 WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BAPTISM

Let us emphasize that we are not the least bit concerned here with what any given religious organization teaches on the subject. It would be impossible to state all of the variations of the beliefs and the history as to how they evolved. We are only concerned with the biblical teaching. While the following is not exhaustive, it is an attempt to totally represent the biblical view.

4.2.1 THE GOSPELS

Baptism was not a religious practice under the Old Testament law, and (as we saw in Chapter 2) the Old Testament law was still in effect until it was nailed to the cross with Christ (Col. 2:14). Thus, we would not expect the full teaching on baptism to be revealed until it was done so by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. This revelation is recorded in the book of Acts, and detailed teachings are given in the letters which the apostles wrote (epistles). However, baptism was so important that its foundations were established by Jesus while He was still on the earth.

The first preacher to baptize was John the baptist. Mark's account is quite concise and informative (Mark 1:1-11):

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye

the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 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. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, [saying], Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Note the following from this passage:

1. John the baptist preached in preparation for the messiah, Jesus Christ, who was formally known as Jesus of Nazareth.
2. As part of this preparation John also preached: "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." However, this did not in any way relieve Jesus or any of the other Jews of their obligations under the Old Testament law.
3. This was clearly water baptism: "and [they] were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."
4. John was not the Christ. He foretold of one who would shortly appear: "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
5. Jesus' baptism by John was accompanied by a miracle which attested that Jesus was the one of whom John had foretold.

According to Matthew's account (Matthew 3:14-15): "John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer [it to be so] now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

Since Jesus had no sin, he was not in need of "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." However, to provide the example to fulfil all righteousness, he

allowed himself to be baptized.

The next mention of baptism indicates that Jesus disciples baptized under His authority. In John 3:22-24 we read: "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison." Clearly this was water baptism, and the lack of distinction between that practiced by Jesus and John implies that they were quite similar (if not identical) in intent.

As we continue to read (John 3:25-30):

Then there arose a question between [some] of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all [men] come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I [must] decrease.

The transition of disciples from John to Jesus was not something that Jesus wished to precipitate prematurely (John 4:1-3): "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,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee."

The final mention of baptism in the gospels is in the great commission. According to Matthew's account (Matthew 28:18-20): "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 Spirit: 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. Amen." The great commission *commands* us to baptize. The command to baptize is right along side the command to preach the gospel and to "teach all things I have commanded you." This shows that the great commission applies equally to us, since the great commission was one of the "all things" which Jesus commanded them.

In Mark's account of the great commission (Mark 16:15-16): "And he [Jesus] 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." Here Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation. Some argue that since Jesus did not say "he

that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned," only faith is the condition. However, if there were two conditions for non-salvation, one could be baptized without believing and still be saved. This would be nonsense. Of course, Jesus could have said "he that believeth not *or* is not baptized shall be damned." However, this would imply that it is possible to have faith without being obedient. As we saw in Chapter 2, this is never taught in the bible, and so we can see the reason that it is not implied here. The Holy Spirit brought to Mark's memory exactly what Jesus said and it was exactly what He meant. Both faith and the clear indication that that faith is alive (baptism) are commanded, and they are conditions of salvation. The person who refuses to be baptized does so because s/he does not believe the clear commands of God.

The gospels alone demonstrate God's commands that believers be baptized. However, this command was not fully understood or implemented until after the Old Testament law was no longer in effect. This occurred when Jesus died on the cross and ushered in the plan of salvation under which we now live. This is documented in the book of Acts.

4.2.2 THE BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts is effectively a continuation of the Gospel according to Luke (compare Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-2). It picks up in history where the gospels leave off -- right after the resurrection of Christ. Jesus appeared after his resurrection and taught them for the duration of 40 days (Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6). Some of the final teachings of Jesus are given in Acts 1:4-8, after which he was observed to ascend into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

The remainder of the first chapter of the book of Acts covers the 10 days between Jesus' ascension and the Jewish religious holiday of Pentecost. Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week at the time of year which coincided with the Jewish observance of the Passover. The word Pentecost comes from the word fifty, indicating that it occurs 50 days after the passover observance. The Jews counted both the beginning and the ending portions of the day. Thus, both the passover observance and the day of Pentecost fell upon the first day of the week. While this does not directly relate to the subject of baptism, it places the second chapter of the book of Acts into its proper context. For, on this day the apostles were immersed in the Holy Spirit, enabling them both to speak with His inspiration and to confirm what they said by definitive miracles. Acts 2:1-4:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak

with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

This is the first record of such an event ever occurring, and it was the fulfillment of the prophecy which Jesus had spoken just a few days before (Acts 1:5): "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence." We will elaborate more on the baptism in (with) the Holy Spirit in Section 4.2.3.1 below. The baptism in the Holy Spirit was a promise; it was never commanded. The apostles did not *practice* it in the sense of doing anything to bring it about. You might validate this as you review Acts 2:1-4 once again.

The essence of Acts chapter 2 is the sermon which Peter spoke. Everything else relates to the circumstances of the environment in which that sermon was spoken. Being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the sermon itself tells us today as it told them on the day of Pentecost *what they needed to do to be saved*. The first part of the sermon (Acts 2:17-21) explained the astounding events which everyone was observing. Peter quoted Old Testament scripture (Joel) to prove that the things which were being done had been carefully planned by God. This was not an illusion, a mass hysteria, or a ploy provoked by emotional manipulation (as is typical of many staged events today).

The next portion of the sermon (Acts 2:22-24) appealed to their own observation. These people, many if not most of whom had been present when Jesus was crucified, had also observed His miracles and knew of His capabilities (reference Mark 15:31). This led directly to another quotation (Acts 2:25-27) from the Old Testament (Psalms 16:8-10). By this Peter went on to reason with them that Jesus through His resurrection had fulfilled this prophecy and ascended to the throne of the kingdom (Acts 2:30-31): "Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."

This was adequate proof for them, and they recognized the full validity of Peter's statement in Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The scriptures are very clear as to what transpired at this point (Acts 2:37-41):

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? 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 Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, [even] as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were

baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls.

Question: what would be your response if someone were to ask you "Men [and] brethren, what shall we do [to be saved]?" Would you take it upon yourself to improve upon that which was inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoken by the apostle Peter on this occasion? By what authority would you say that baptism should be omitted from your response? What in the New Testament indicates that it is of secondary importance? In this passage it is placed as a condition of salvation on the same level as repentance. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." What could be said about those who refused to be baptized?

We are going to see that every detailed case of conversion given in the book of Acts states that the subject(s) were baptized. We repeat: there is no clearer doctrine spelled out in the New Testament than the importance that baptism plays in our salvation. We challenge those who teach otherwise to deal with all of the scriptures which are presented in this entire chapter.

The next case of conversion is in Acts 8, and it is significant because it applied to Samaritans, a half-breed race which were generally shunned by the Jews (recall Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan women in John 4:9). It was the first step in taking the gospel to the "all nations." However, to get the context, let us first briefly review the chapters after Acts 2 that lead up to it.

In Acts 3-5 we read of the persecutions to which the apostles were subjected from the Jews when the apostles performed miracles in the name of Jesus. Acts 6 shows an issue involving racial distinctions in the first century church and how it was resolved. Acts 7 is the sermon that Stephen gave to the Jews who "set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:13-14).

This was an interesting accusation in that it was partially true. However, anything that is only half true is 100% false. While it was true that the Old Testament law was nailed to the cross with Christ (Col. 2:14), and that the temple would be destroyed (Mt. 24), Stephen was not blaspheming the law or in any way disallowing the customs of Moses, which were still permitted under the New Testament. The entire seventh chapter of Acts is a review of the Old Testament, which demonstrates that the accusations against Stephen were without any foundation. However, as is usually the case, close-minded leaders turn to the only recourse that they have when presented with the clear truth: violence.

The stoning of Stephen was much like throwing water onto a grease fire. It

resulted in the very opposite of that which the Jews intended, and demonstrated the wisdom of God (Acts 8:4): "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."

This leads us to the next documented cases of conversion which was different only in that it involved Samaritans (8:5-13):

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed [with them]: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 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.

There are a multitude of lessons that could be obtained from this passage, but we wish to remain on the subject of this chapter by demonstrating that the doctrine and practice of baptism was an integral part of the preaching of the gospel. Clearly this was water (and not Holy Spirit) baptism as we observe by reading on (Acts 8:14-17): "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they [their] hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

Nationality seemed to motivate the recording of the next case of conversion as well, which is by far the most detailed case in the New Testament. It involved a native Ethiopian who was a Jewish proselyte, demonstrating God's respect for faithfulness regardless of color or nationality. It occurs in Acts 8:26-39:

And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch

of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to [him], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on [their] way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, [here is] water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Reread the above passage and note the following:

- 1.The eunuch *heard* the word from the Old Testament and from Philip who was inspired to speak the truth of the gospel.
- 2.The eunuch *believed* both the Old Testament prophesy and the new teaching which Philip imparted to him by preaching (Rom. 10:17). It is necessarily implied that this "preaching of Jesus" included the doctrine of baptism.
- 3.While not explicitly stated, *repentance* is implied. The only condition which Philip placed upon his baptism was his willingness to *confess* his belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
- 4.The mode of *baptism* is clearly revealed to us by this example. There is not the slightest implication that baptism was of secondary importance.

Note that this example is totally consistent with the conditions which Jesus placed upon our salvation which are outlined in Section 3.6.

The next example of conversion -- that of Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) -- is one which is often seized upon for an example for us today. Yet I know of no one who claims to have been stricken blind as part of his/her getting into a covenant relationship with God. In reality, the experience that Paul had on the road to Damascus did not save him -- it only got his attention. What saved Paul was the same thing that saved the Jews on Pentecost, the Samaritans and the eunuch: a living faith in the word of God. This living faith motivated them to do God's will to the best of their knowledge and ability. See that it was this same living faith that Paul had as we consider his conversion in detail (Acts 9:1-22):

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought [him] into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I [am here], Lord. And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for [one] called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting [his] hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, [even] Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it

had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard [him] were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

It is interesting that, just as the angel did not speak directly to the eunuch to tell him what he must do to be saved, Jesus did not speak directly to Paul to tell him what he must do to be saved. Paul asked the question: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." From that point forward the conversion of Paul was quite similar to all other examples in the New Testament.

Now Paul's "calling" was different in the sense that he was chosen to be an apostle (1 Cor. 15:8-11). However, the process of conversion was the same. He was taught the gospel of Jesus Christ by natural means -- *hearing* the words of Ananias. He *believed* and was *baptized*.

Let us look further into this conversion, which is recalled by Paul during his preaching later on in the book of Acts (Acts 22:6-16):

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.

This verse links baptism to washing away Paul's sins. If Paul was in a saved condition prior to baptism, then he was saved before having his sins washed away.

The next case of conversion is recorded in the tenth chapter of Acts and it is further explained in Chapter 11. It is quite significant because it details the conversions of the first gentiles to Christ. We have already discussed the racial problems which existed in the first century church. So their conversions directly into the body of Christ, and not through being proselyted into Judaism (i.e., via circumcision), caused quite a stir among the existing converts, all of whom were Jews.

Because these conversion also involved the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we will take up that aspect of it in more detail in Section 4.2.3.1. We will summarize the story here and quote the scriptures that we feel most relevant, but we urge you to read both of these chapters in detail.

The story begins with an introduction to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2): "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian [band], [A] devout [man], and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." Few people today would even think this man would be in need of salvation. However, recognize that we cannot be saved by the works of our own hands -- we are all in need of the blood of Christ regardless of how devout or righteous we might be. Cornelius in this condition (without Christ) received a vision of God which prepared him for the preaching of the apostle Peter. This vision (Acts 10:3-8) instructed him to send for Peter, which would take about a day to accomplish.

At about the time that the messengers from Cornelius were arriving, Peter had a vision which instructed him to eat some meat which was unclean according to the Old Testament law (which Christians were no longer under). Peter refused to do so thinking that it was against God's law, and the response is given in Acts 10:15-16: "And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

At this point Peter did not fully understand the vision (Acts 10:17). However, the men from Cornelius arrived at that very moment, and Peter consented to go with them. Once he got there, he put two and two together, as recorded in Acts 10:28: "And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I [unto you] without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" Racial problems are not unique to our generation, and the breaking down of the walls that had so long separated Jew and gentile goes a long way toward explaining the meaning of the

events of these two chapters. It is interesting that Peter would ask the reason that he was summoned; however, this might have been a rhetorical question to set the context for the preaching of the gospel.

Cornelius explained his vision and stated (Acts 10:33): "Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Peter's response was very enlightening (Acts 10:34-35): "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." This is a very interesting and definitive teaching with regard to the elimination of racism from the Lord's church. But what does this have to do with baptism? Much -- if we recognize that baptism was analogous to circumcision in that it is the act that puts a person into the Lord's kingdom. [We will show this in the next section when we discuss Colossians 2:8-15. However, if we recognize it at this point, it helps to explain the interaction in this chapter between the racial issue and baptism.]

Several Jewish Christians had come with Peter to observe. Those of their number who wanted to go back under the Old Testament law had no problem with gentiles being baptized if they were circumcised first. However, this would be the first case of their being baptized without the benefit of circumcision.

The sermon that Peter proceeded to preach to them (Acts 10:34-43) is a very interesting, concise summary of the gospel. Peter did not have a chance to finish, however, before the following events occurred (Acts 10:44-48):

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit 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 Spirit. 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? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

The fact that the Holy Spirit fell upon them and enabled them to speak in tongues was not adequate demonstration of their salvation. It was, however, sufficient proof to the Jews accompanying Peter that these gentiles were fit subjects for baptism for the remission of their sins. So Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." If they refused this command claiming that their baptism in the Holy Spirit was ample demonstration of their salvation, would they be acceptable to God?

We will pick up this story again in Section 4.2.3.1, where we will show that Cornelius and the gentiles with him were, in fact, baptized in the Holy Spirit. As was the case on the day of Pentecost, they were not expecting it, praying for it, or in any other way anticipating it. Since we are concentrating on the subject of water baptism for the remission of sins at this point, we need only observe that these gentiles were converted the same way that all other Christians were and have been converted since Jesus died on the cross. They *heard* the word, *believed* it, and with a willingness to *repent* of their sins and *confess* their belief that Jesus was the son of God, they were *baptized* for the remission of their sins.

As with many other conversions recorded in the book of Acts, miraculous events played a part, but they were peripheral to the actual process of conversion itself. That is, the miracles revealed and confirmed the truth -- exactly the role that the bible performs for us today. The process of hearing, believing and obeying the truth (our part) is *identical* for us today as it was for everyone converted in the first century.

Acts 11 further explains Acts 10, and then tells about the various other churches which were formed (especially Antioch), and the fact that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). This is quite significant, since most denominationalists today are under the impression that Jerusalem was the center of all church activity. Although several of the apostles remained at Jerusalem, the actual work of the church was as distributed as the Christians were. Christians did not need the apostles' presence, they had the authority of Christ. Neither did they need a central organization, all they needed was the truth.

Acts 12 tells of the ratcheting up of the persecution, now by the puppet government which was installed by Rome to rule the Jews. However, the motivation was still to please the Jews who were still very concerned about losing their political and economic base if the church was allowed to grow. Despite all of this Acts 12:24 sums it up: "But the word of God grew and multiplied." Christians were being made, souls were being saved, but it was the word of God that was growing and multiplying.

Early in Acts 13 we read about the church at Antioch sending out Paul and Barnabas on what is generally called Paul's first missionary journey. They needed no edict or authority from Jerusalem -- they had the word. Chapters 13 and 14 contain the experiences of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel and established churches in most of the cities that they visited. There are no individual cases of conversion detailed in these chapters. Nor are any documented in Acts 15, which we have discussed in detail in Section 2.2.2.

There are two detailed cases of conversions in Acts 16, which begins what is commonly called Paul's second missionary journey. The first is described beginning in verse 13, but to include the location, we will also quote verse 12 (Acts 16:12-15):

And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, [and] a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted [thither]. 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.

At this point (the writer) Luke apparently understood that the reader would assume that if she believed what Paul said, she would be baptized. So there is not an assertion of the fact, but "And when she was baptized ..."

The next case is given after Paul and Silas were thrown in jail after exorcising a spirit of divination from a young maiden whose owners were using the evil spirit that possessed her for their gain. Losing their means of income, they stirred up the city against Paul and Silas and the magistrates had them put in the inner prison. God intervened with an earthquake and miraculously all of the prisoners were released. Generally, a Roman jailor who allowed prisoners to escape paid with his life. Apparently to avoid this fate, the jailor was about to kill himself, where we pick up the story (Acts 16:27-34):

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 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 they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Once again we see that the pattern is the same. *Hearing* the truth, the jailor *believed*, *repented* of his past sins and was *baptized* for the remission of sins.

As the book of Acts progresses, we would expect it to become less explicit with regard to some of the details of conversions. For example, when it comes to the

Corinthians in chapter 18, it merely states (Acts 18:8): "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."

A final example is quite informative in that it indicates that calling an act *baptism* does not qualify it to be "in the name of the Lord." Let us consider the passage first (Acts 19:1-7):

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

We read in Acts 8 that it was through the laying on of the apostles hands that the Holy Spirit was given. Paul, in discussing this with these disciples in Ephesus discovered that, not were they ignorant of this, they had not even been baptized by the right authority. True, they had been baptized unto John's baptism, and in the era of John the baptist this was according to God's will. However, this is not what God wants for us now. We must be baptized in the name (i.e., by the authority) of the Lord Jesus.

The ramifications of this are tremendous! Why were you baptized? Was it because your church leaders told you to? Was it to gain entry into some denomination? Was it without your knowledge when you were a little child? Or, was it by the authority of Jesus Christ? *If it was not by His authority and for the purpose which He determined -- for the remission of sins -- then you need to be baptized as those in Acts 19 were.* If not, then why were those in Acts 19 commanded to be baptized again? Is God a respecter of persons?

We have presented all of the detailed cases of conversion given in the book of Acts (and hence the New Testament, since all of them are recorded in Acts). We notice that some of the steps which are obviously a part of Gods plan to bring man to redemption are omitted in some of these examples. We do not have an *explicit* statement (although it is implied) that they all heard, believed, repented and confessed their belief in Jesus being the son of God. However, *we read the explicit statement that those converted were baptized in every single case.* This is no fluke -- God does not put something in the scriptures for no reason.

As for the reason and importance of baptism, this is covered in detail in the epistles which we will consider next. Let us complete this section with a question: if baptism is mentioned so often in the book of Acts, why is it not discussed more from the pulpit? Why is it so skillfully avoided? As we continue to see the frequency, clarity and consistency with which baptism is discussed in the New Testament, keep these questions in mind.

4.2.3 THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

When the first converts were commanded to be baptized, there appeared to be a knowledge of the mode and purpose of baptism. There was no controversy as to whether it was "necessary" or what its purpose was. There is no doubt that the work of John the Baptist not only introduced Jesus but served to prepare the people for the religious practice of baptism as well. We see this on the day of Pentecost when the first gospel sermon was preached under the inspiration (and with the baptism) of the Holy Spirit. There was no question as to the mode and purpose of baptism when Peter commanded (Acts 2:38): "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 Spirit."

It seems, however, that the early Christians were just like us in that they soon forgot the reasons for and the significance of what they had been through. To many, baptism might have become a mere prerequisite for local church fellowship, as it has become to many today. They may have viewed it merely as a work to be accomplished and forgotten. It may have been relegated to a secondary role, as we have seen is generally the case in denominationalism today.

For these reasons the writers of the epistles, and the apostle Paul in particular, provided additional information with regard to baptism as they wrote the various churches. We will consider these according to the letters in which they occur. Remember as you read these letters that they were addressed to Christians.

4.2.3.1 ROMANS

Some at the church at Rome had apparently fallen under the influence of false teacher who led them to exploit the grace of God. Essentially they called evil good and good evil by teaching that if Christians did any works of righteousness they would not be relying upon the grace of God. [While this extreme might not exist today, the basic concept is one that keeps many from observing scriptural baptism.] We see Paul responding to this in Romans 6:1-11:

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. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us summarize the teachings of this passage:

- 1.The idea that we somehow glorify God by continuing in sin is as far from the doctrine of Christ as one can get, and it is sure to result in eternal condemnation to those who live by it.
- 2.Paul understood that the Christians at Rome understood that they had been "baptized into Christ." We saw above that baptism was that final act in all detailed conversions given in the book of Acts. One cannot have fellowship with God or Christ as long as they are in their sins. Baptism being the final act of conversion is consistent with it being for the remission of sins, which is what is taught in Acts 2:38.
- 3.While they seemed to understand that they were baptized into Jesus Christ, they did not seem to understand that they were "baptized into his death." This is allegorical, the burial in water representing a burial *after* our death to sin (repentance).
- 4.The death is not nearly as important as the resurrection: "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." This is the essence of what Paul was trying to communicate to them. However, the lessons that we learn with regard to baptism are significant.
- 5.Our death to sin is analogous to Christ's death on the cross; repentance is analogous to his crucifixion: "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."

Before we leave this passage, let us compare it with the rebirth which Jesus made a

condition of salvation. Recall what Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:3-6): "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."

If being born "of water and the Spirit" is not accomplished by the act of faith which results in baptism, then what does? Baptism is what puts a person into Christ, and if one is not in Christ, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." If one does not become a part of the body of Christ, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Indeed, the body of Christ, the church and the kingdom of God are one and the same (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:13), and when you enter one, you enter them all.

4.2.3.2 FIRST CORINTHIANS

The primary problem in Corinth was one of division. Early in the first chapter we see that they were denominating the church by naming their various factions after men. Paul uses the doctrine of baptism to demonstrate to them that this should not be the case (1 Cor. 12:12-13): "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

In Romans 6 we learned that Christians were "baptized into Jesus Christ." Here we learn that Christians are "all baptized into one body," and therefore, there should be absolutely no divisions within that body. We can say that the Corinthians were much closer to unity than are the denominations. At least the Corinthians did not disagree on the purpose or mode of baptism. Clearly they understood that it was the act of faith that added them to the Lord's body, the church.

4.2.3.3 GALATIANS

We discussed the difference between the old and new laws in Chapter 2, and to communicate this was the main objective of Paul's letter to the church at Galatia. Note how he weaves the doctrine of baptism into the argument against racial division, just as he did for the Corinthians with regard to their doctrinal divisions (Galatians 3:23-29):

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster

[to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 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.

Note the following:

1. *Faith* is used interchangeably here with the entire gospel of Jesus Christ when he says "before *faith* came."
2. The Old Testament law was like a schoolmaster to bring them to a point where the sacrifice of Christ could have its full meaning. However, after Christ had delivered the gospel there was no longer a need for the schoolmaster.
3. As is true with the Romans and Corinthians, Paul assumes that they understand that they were "baptized into Christ." What they did not seem to understand is that they should have "put on Christ." Just as when we put on a coat, anyone looking at us sees primarily the coat, when we put on Christ that is what should be seen predominantly in our lives.
4. Conclusion: there can be no racial, economic or sexual distinctions as to the acceptability of those who are baptized into Christ -- all are equally acceptable, and there should be absolutely no divisions in His body.

We are beginning to see that the teachings on baptism are not isolated passages that can be taken out of context. There are universal doctrines which require considerable effort to avoid and misunderstand.

4.2.3.4 COLOSSIANS

The problems at Colosse were much the same as those which existed in Galatia. The Judaizing teachers within the church were starting with the binding of circumcision in an attempt to force all Christians to observe the entire Old Testament law (see Acts 15:5). To this the apostle Paul gave a number of responses, the following of which included a reference to baptism (Col. 2:8-15):

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. 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; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; [And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Observe the following:

1. Circumcision was that unique and *totally unreasonable* act which God had given to the nation of Israel through which they were to separate themselves from the world and confirm their covenant with Him. It was unreasonable in that there is no way that human wisdom would lead to such an action. The Jews thoroughly understood its significance, and the gentile Christians at Colosse were also probably given this Old Testament background as part of their instruction as Christians.
2. "In whom [Christ] 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." Clearly baptism has replaced circumcision as the action which puts one into the kingdom of God, which as we saw above is another designation for the body of Christ, or the church. Baptism is the "circumcision of Christ."
3. Notice the similarity between the *shadow* of things to come (see Col. 2:17), circumcision, and the *reality* in Christ: baptism:
 - a) Both were totally unreasonable actions from the point of view of man, and, as such, neither is a work of man's origin.
 - b) Both are things that are done to a person, not something that a person does (albeit a person must subject himself to it).
 - c) Both mark that point in time at which there is the separation from the world and the entrance into full citizenship of the people of God -- circumcision under the Old Testament and baptism under the New Testament.
 - d) Both are considered by the holy scriptures to be of the highest importance in satisfying the desires of God.
4. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he

quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." When did this quickening occur? Clearly, when they were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.

5. Is there something magic in immersion? Should we make it into some mystical rite? Absolutely not. What makes baptism valid is not the mere act itself -- it is the "faith of the operation of God," or as the American Standard puts it "faith in the working of God." Baptism is not a work of man, it is an act of faith in the working of God.

6. Baptism without faith is invalid. However, this does not imply that faith can exist without baptism. We are not at liberty to tell God how we are going to express our faith in Him, how we are going to be free from our sins, or how we are going to enter His kingdom. He has set the terms, and if we have faith in Him, we will accept His terms. Baptism without faith is invalid; faith without baptism is equally invalid.

4.2.3.4 FIRST PETER

While we have presented over a dozen scriptures which indicate that baptism is that act which puts the convert into a saved condition, the only scripture which explicitly states that "baptism saves" is the first letter which we have from the apostle Peter. Let us consider this passage carefully (1 Peter 3:18-22):

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.

Some have made this a difficult scripture by their mystical interpretation process. It is important that we allow our reasoning to progress from the *known* to that which might be somewhat obscure.

Let us subdivide the passage and establish that which is clear from this passage, especially as it relates to baptism:

1. The first part is quite understandable: "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 ..." We understand that Jesus gave His life on the cross for us that, although we are unjust, we can be justified and enter into a covenant relationship with God. Jesus was "put to death in the flesh" -- crucified and buried. But he was "quickened by the spirit" -- made alive by the power of the His eternal and divine spirit.
2. "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison ..." Not in the body, but by His spiritual presence Jesus went and preached to the spirits which are now "in prison," i.e., awaiting the final judgment. Jesus is often declared to have had a presence in Old Testament times (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). This presence was through His spirit, although the actual preaching was done by Noah. The spirits in prison are those who were enslaved to sin in Noah's time.
3. "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." This is speaking of the spirits in prison. From the record we know that they were extremely disobedient. We also read in 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," and thus we can conclude that Jesus spoke through him. Noah was saved, or separated from sin, "by water."

Note: the author would certainly not be dogmatic with regard to the meaning of the scriptures given above. There are alternative explanations which are equally as plausible. However, the resolution of these has no effect upon the interpretation or application of the verses which follow.

4. "The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us ..." In Noah's time the world was totally consumed with sin (see Genesis 6:5). The world was completely immersed with water, which thoroughly cleansed it from the sinful humanity which inhabited it. Just as Noah was separated from sin by this "baptism" of the earth, we are separated from our sin by faith in the working of God when we are obedient in baptism. In the sense that baptism separates us from our sins and places us into Christ, baptism saves. However, we have emphasized that we are not saved by *baptism only* any more than we are saved by anything else *only*.
5. "... (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) ..." It is not the mere washing of the dirt off the body that saves. If so, all would be saved. It is the involvement of the very spirit of the individual. Baptism must be preceded by faith, repentance and the willingness to confess the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. This is summarized as "the answer of a good conscience toward God."

6."... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..." Removing the parenthetical statement, the verse would read: "The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..." This is totally consistent with the teaching of the apostle Paul which we reviewed above in which baptism is referenced as a burial with Christ, e.g., Romans 6:4: "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." Without the resurrection of Christ, baptism would be meaningless.

While the context of the statement "baptism doth also now save us" may be difficult to resolve, the statement itself is not. It is totally consistent with every other passage on water baptism in the New Testament, all of which must be explained away if, in fact, the act of baptism is not that act which transforms the alien sinner into Christ.

This brings to a close the biblical teachings with regard to water baptism. Avoiding this overwhelming body of evidence, false teachers within the denominations have used a number of arguments to relegate baptism to a secondary role, if not denying its role in salvation altogether. The remaining sections of this chapter will deal with some of these. We will first consider other types of baptism which the New Testament defines. Then we will discuss the common objections which have been made in an attempt to disregard the biblical doctrine. Finally, we return once again to the importance of sound doctrine in general.

4.2.4 OTHER BAPTISMS

Frequently those arguing against the biblical doctrine of baptism will evade the issue by arguing that the baptism mentioned in a given scripture is not water baptism. That there are other types of baptism discussed in the New Testament is not the issue, and we will deal with them in the following subsections. However, we have seen in our study above that the one baptism practiced by the church in the first century was emersion in water for the remission of sins.

In Ephesians 4:1-6 the apostle Paul wrote:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all.

Thus, understanding and practicing this "one baptism" was just as essential to keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" as understanding the fact that there is one Spirit, one God and One Lord, etc. To intentionally confuse others by stating that we are now subject to two or three baptisms destroys the unity of the Spirit and does despite to the bond of peace.

That emersion in water for the remission of sins was the one baptism practiced in the first century is quite obvious from the scriptures presented above. Thus, generally when the word *baptism* appears in the New Testament, this is what is being spoken of. Those who practice any type of water baptism are tasked with the heavy responsibility of explaining why they also practice another in light of Paul's assertion "there is one baptism." The burden of proof is upon them; I cannot explain it.

That other baptisms are described in the New Testament is readily admitted. We will discuss three others: (1) baptism of the Holy Spirit, (2) baptism of fire, and (3) baptism for the dead. We will also discuss the use of the word baptism in reference to an emersion in suffering. As these are discussed it will become clear that, while they existed, they were not commanded. Indeed, if the mere mention of the existence of a type of baptism in the New Testament necessarily implies that we are supposed to practice it today, then we would need to practice all four or five of these. However, as we examine them more closely we will see that this is not the case, and that "there is one baptism" practiced by the Lord's church.

4.2.3.1 BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit baptism is by far the type of baptism most often confused with the scriptural baptism which is commanded. Some would totally write off all of the arguments made above by substituting Holy Spirit baptism in every occurrence of baptism, thereby mystifying the process and making it a purely subjective experience. This blurring of reality is difficult to deal with, and all we can do is plead with those so inclined to read the scriptures objectively. For example, read the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. How can this be made into Holy Spirit baptism? It is just not there!

In all cases where Holy Spirit baptism occurred, it is so described. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was first mentioned by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11): "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 Spirit, and [with] fire." Let us defer discussion of baptism with fire for the present except to say that if this statement were a command, we would also be commanded to be baptized with fire. Some rationalize that they are the same thing, but we will show in the next section that the baptism with fire was an extreme warning, a threat of the terrors of hell. As

contrasted with this, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise, and it is described as such throughout the New Testament.

As an aside, it is very important that we do not confuse being filled with the Holy Spirit with being baptized in the Holy Spirit. These are two different things. We see many good men who were totally dedicated to God described as being "filled with the Holy Spirit." For example, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist is described in Luke 1:67 as being "filled with the Holy Spirit." Clearly the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet occurred -- John the Baptist who predicted it was not yet even born. As further evidence, consider the words of Jesus in John 7:37-39:

In the last day, that great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet [given]; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

So while there were those prior to the resurrection of Christ who were *filled* with the Holy Spirit, there was a further promise of the giving of the Holy Spirit which had not occurred. This would be ushered in by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The very figure itself -- immersion as opposed to filling -- is indicative of a greater measure.

Recall that Jesus was the one who promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:26): "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This was on the night that He was betrayed. Clearly this is a promise, not a command. Although we should realize that this promise is not limited to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, this greater revelation was going to be heralded by the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

We know that the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not occurred prior to the day of Pentecost by reading the first verses of the book of Acts (Acts 1:1-8):

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy

Spirit not many days hence.

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Note first that even this is limited to the apostles: "being assembled together with them" i.e., the apostles. At this point he commanded them "to wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."

Thus, the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was repeated specifically to the apostles. At this point the apostles were still not fully understanding what this meant. They still supposed that this meant a political or military empowerment: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus knew that when they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit they would understand, so he stated what they were to expect upon their baptism: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

It is quite clear that the fulfillment of this prophesy came only about ten days later on the day of Pentecost. Read carefully exactly what happened (Acts 2:1-4):

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

From the last verse of the previous chapter we see that the "they" here is the apostles, the very same as Jesus had repeated the promise to a few days earlier. They were the only ones who had the capacity to be witnesses of Him, having been with him throughout His ministry (see Acts 1:21-22).

"... they were all with one accord in one place." It does not say that they had yet instituted meetings on the first day of the week. Pentecost fell on the first day of the

week; however, they could have been together for that holiday celebration. In any event, there was no record of any type of emotional stimulation or any other man-made invocation of the action of the Holy Spirit. This is totally consistent with 2 Peter 1:21: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost." *It was totally unexpected.*

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." This was not a group illusion. It was a supernatural event which could be *clearly seen and clearly heard* by the natural senses of men and women. It was not wind, but this was the closest thing to describe what they heard; it was not fire, but that was the closest thing to describe what they saw. However, what they saw and heard were clearly not anything that they had never seen nor heard before. The "them" here is the same as the "they" previously -- the apostles.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This too is clearly a supernatural event which proved definitively the truth of what the apostles were speaking. This would not have been possible had the apostles been using language which could not be understood. This event defines what it means to "speak in other tongues." Until and unless the New Testament enlarges the definition, these tongues were languages which could clearly be understood by those who heard it in their native tongues. (Acts 2:5-8): "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

There is nothing else in Acts 1-2 that tells us that this was an occurrence of a *baptism* in the Holy Spirit other than the timing which coincides with the words of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:5 ("For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence"). There is only one other situation which is in any way comparable to this. Interestingly, while Pentecost was the first preaching of the gospel to the Jews, the second occurrence of baptism in the Holy Spirit occurred when the gospel was preached to the first gentiles.

We discussed the conversion of Cornelius and the gentiles that were present on that occasion above in Section 4.2.2. We will not repeat that background. However, at this point we wish to focus on the aspects of that event that made it a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Recall that as Peter was preaching the gospel of Christ to them (Acts 10:44-48): "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit 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? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

We know that when "the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word," this was a baptism in the Holy Spirit because in Acts 11 after those of the circumcision contended with Peter about it, this was his reply (Acts 11:15-18): "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. 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."

"The Holy Spirit fell on them [the gentiles], as on us [the apostles] at the beginning." Notice that Peter makes a distinction between this event and what had become the more routine imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles hands. This was not the imparting that we observed, for example, in Acts 8. It was a direct bestowal from God which was therefore like that which the apostles experienced in the beginning.

It was the second occurrence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If not, then why would Peter state: "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit?" Then he went on to argue that this was God's testimony that they were fit subjects for baptism. A careful reading of Acts 10 and 11 will show that this second occurrence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was as much for the benefit of the Jewish converts as it was for the gentiles. Indeed, while the speaking in tongues was for the unconverted in Acts 2, it is now for the converted.

Why was such a sign needed for believers? The answer lies in the deep-rooted racial prejudice which is still so evident in our world today. What would it take to convince the religious bigot today? God did everything that he could short of forcing them to believe, and apparently the demonstration had an immediate positive effect. However, from the recurring problems of the Judaizing Christians in most of the churches that Paul wrote to, it did not totally solve the problem.

This second occurrence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit was quite analogous to the first. Note the following similarities:

1. It was an introduction of the gospel to a new "race" of people (the Jews in Acts 2, the gentiles in Acts 10),

2.It was not the result of emotionalism -- in both cases it was totally *unexpected*, and

3.It was clear proof to even the most hardened of skeptics (or the most prejudiced) that the gospel was indeed the will of God.

The two events recorded in Acts 2 and Acts 10 are the *only* events that the New Testament identifies as being baptisms with the Holy Spirit. The author would be in sin to state that it occurred at any other time (2 John 9). The purpose here, however, is not to convince you of this nearly as much as it is to get you to investigate this for yourself. So, search the book of Acts in detail and determine if any other events are stated to be a baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, recognize that the essence and true value of the promise of the Holy Spirit is not the miracles which were produced -- it was the revelation of the truth, for it is in the truth of God that we have salvation.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit were not limited to those who were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Let's review Acts 8 once again. There we see a man who was endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, Philip, preaching to the Samaritans. Philip had received these gifts from the laying on of the apostles hands (possibly as recorded in Acts 6:5-6). The result of Philip's preaching is recorded in Acts 8:6: "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

Acts 8:7-11 tells about a man named Simon who had previously influenced these people with his sorcery and tricks. "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" (Acts 12-13).

It is clear, however, that while Philip could preach, confirm the truth he spoke with miracles, baptize and thus lead others to salvation, he could not impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the new converts. Of course, prior to the completion of the New Testament, which would thoroughly furnish mankind unto every good work, it was necessary for new converts to be endowed with these gifts so that they would have access to the truth. The problem was that the apostles who could impart this through the laying on of their hands were in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14-19):

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 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.

With the exception of Acts 2 and Acts 10 (the baptisms with the Holy Spirit) there is no record of direct impartations of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Acts 19 gives another example (Acts 19:5-6): "When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

If the baptism with the Holy Spirit were to occur today, we would expect it to happen just as it did in the first century as recorded in the book of Acts. It would not be brought about by emotions or the will of man. However, when men and women were gathered together serving God to the best of their ability according to His word, He would act upon them in a way which was so obviously supernatural and miraculous that testimony of men to this effect would not be required.

In conclusion, the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a promise of Jesus. It was not something that was commanded, and it cannot be obeyed. The two times that it was recorded to have occurred in the New Testament were truly extraordinary events which ushered in a new era in what God expected from His people. These baptisms were totally sufficient to set in motion the revelation of the entire gospel of Christ, through which we are saved. Thus, they thoroughly fulfilled the promise which John the Baptist and Jesus made with regard to Holy Spirit baptism.

4.2.3.2 BAPTISM OF FIRE

The baptism of fire is completely different from the baptism with the Holy Spirit, as we can see by reading the rest of the words of John the Baptist as presented in Matthew 3:11-12: "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."

Note the contrast between the wheat and the chaff. The wheat will obtain the benefits of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the essence of which was *the revelation of the truth*. The chaff would be burned with unquenchable fire -- the baptism with fire. If this is not talking about the judgment, then this language is quite misleading, which we doubt.

No other mention is made of the baptism of fire per se in the rest of the New Testament with the exception of the same account in the other gospels. However, emersion in fire, whether it be literal or figurative of something much worse is a continuous warning throughout the New Testament. Well over half of the time that the word *fire* is used in the New Testament it is referring to this place of eternal torment of the unrighteous. This baptism was not commanded -- we are informed of it to warn us from the wrath of God to come.

Some have thought that because fire is mentioned in the Pentecost account, that this was the baptism with fire. Acts 2:3 reads: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." This was not a baptism with fire -- fire was not even involved. If this was a baptism with fire, then Acts 2:2 would be a baptism in wind ("... And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting"). Neither wind nor fire were involved.

4.2.3.3 BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

The subject of baptism for the dead is, admittedly, one of those writings of Paul "in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16). This being the case, it is essential that we do not over-ride those very clear and easy-to-understand scriptures, such as those which related to water baptism given above. As contrasted with the repetitive nature of those scriptures, there is only one which relates to baptism for the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:29: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"

In order to begin to understand this verse it is essential that you read the entire 15th chapter. The apostle Paul is dealing with some false teachers who were teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). He gives a series of a dozen or so arguments (depending upon how you count) as to reasons that this teaching was false. It is a tremendously fascinating study, and if you have not studied it, we urge you to do so.

To understand verse 29 we must recognize that the apostle Paul was still adding to this argumentation. This argument is fairly self contained. There are several plausible explanations which fit the context. For example, some believe that the "baptism for the dead" is a baptism in suffering for the cause of Christ. This is consistent with the argumentation -- why would they do this if there was not a resurrection. Why would the apostles be suffering to the extent that they were? This fits with the next question: "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"

We believe that a much more plausible explanation is that the false teachers in

Corinth were themselves practicing the false doctrine of baptism for the dead. This creates absolutely no need for twisting the obvious meanings of the words, and it presents a *devastating* argument which would completely destroy the influence of the false teachers (at least upon those who were honest). In effect, it worked one false doctrine against another. If you do not believe in the resurrection from the dead, why do you practice baptism for the dead?

While we do not believe it essential to know exactly the meaning of this verse, and would surely not be dogmatic about it, the following arguments support the view that the false teachers were, in fact, practicing the *false* doctrine of baptism for the dead:

1. Paul asks "Else what shall *they* do which are baptized for the dead..." He does not include himself or the apostles in this practice. We know that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). There is not one shred of evidence anywhere in the New or Old Testaments that there is anything that the living can do can have an influence over the fate of the dead. Just the opposite is taught (e.g., see Luke 16:19-31). Thus, baptism in behalf of the dead would be a complete contradiction to everything which the bible teaches with regard to our salvation.
2. "... if the dead rise not at all?" The people teaching this had to be the same as the ones practicing baptism for the dead or else the entire argument would be irrelevant. The false teachers could merely respond: we don't and they shouldn't because there is no resurrection. Clearly, the very same ones who taught that there was no resurrection *were* practicing baptism for the dead. This is certainly not a good authority upon which we should base any such practice (as some have).
3. "... why are they then baptized for the dead?" This argument is truly devastating. Paul saved it for almost the last argument that he presented. Here they were practicing baptism for the dead when they did not even believe that the dead would be raised.
4. "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" Note the switch. *They* practice baptism for the dead but do not stand in jeopardy. *We* do not practice baptism for the dead, but the very fact that we (the apostles) stand in jeopardy every hour is ample evidence that they knew that Jesus was resurrected and that Jesus taught that they too would be resurrected from the dead.
5. The fact that Paul cites a practice as part of an argument does not infer that he agrees with the practice. There are several examples which could be given; a good one is recorded in Romans 2:25: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." Obviously Paul was not teaching the necessity for circumcision, but for purposes of

argumentation he allowed for a moment that it would profit if we were able to keep the entire law flawlessly. It was not necessary for Paul to oppose a doctrine as absurd as baptism for the dead, and to do so would not have addressed the subject (i.e., the resurrection).

Again, we would not be dogmatic about this, but it seems to us to be the most logical explanation.

If we assume that baptism for the dead was being practiced at all (even erroneously), it further confirms the early Christians' belief that *baptism was essential to salvation*. Again, however, there is absolutely no evidence that baptism for the dead was in any way sanctioned by the apostles.

4.2.3.4 THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

The baptism John the baptist was authorized of God because John the baptist was sent of God. It was for the remission of sins, but it was not to put the subject into the body of Christ because the church had not been established prior to the day of Pentecost (the first recorded preaching of the gospel after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ). Thus, it was necessary for those baptized by John's authority (i.e., in his name) to be baptized again into the name of Christ. This is clear from a passage that begins in Acts 18:24 and ends in 19:7:

And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, [and] mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto [them], and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, [and that] publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should

believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

We will not belabor a discussion of this passage since it has been discussed in Section 4.2.3.1. However, it is interesting that "they should believe on him [Jesus]" infers that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; for, when they heard the first, they were obedient to the second.

4.2.3.5 OTHER MENTIONS OF BAPTISM

The word baptism means immersion, and anywhere that we might find immersion we might find it translated (or transliterated) as baptism. In most cases its *figurative* use is intended to convey the meaning of an immersion in suffering. Consider Matthew 20:20-23:

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping [him], and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but [it shall be given to them] for whom it is prepared of my Father.

The meaning is quite clear.

Similarly, in Luke 12:49-53: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law."

Uses of the word baptism in such contexts do not relate to the major premise of this chapter. Those who would invoke these scriptures in an attempt to place baptism in a secondary role are merely trying to confuse the issues.

4.3 COMMON OBJECTIONS AGAINST BAPTISM

We anticipate that there will be some arguments made on behalf of the myth that baptism is secondary. In this section we anticipate those which we have heard in the past. We encourage the study of these possible arguments since study motivated by a search for the truth can only increase faith.

4.3.1 SALVATION IS NOT BY WORKS

The reasoning applied is given by the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: Salvation is not by works,
2. Minor premise: Baptism is a work; therefore
3. Conclusion: Baptism can have nothing to do with salvation.

Of course, this logic could be applied to obtain release from any and all of God's commands. Example: Hearing is a work. If not, why not? It certainly requires more effort than baptism. Are we to refrain from hearing the truth so that we will not be saved by works? Apparently those who avoid hearing the truth think so.

Those who apply the logic above usually believe in faith only, a myth which we covered in sufficient detail in Chapter 3. However to get the discussion going, consider the response that Jesus gave when he was asked what one needed to do to work the works of God (John 6:29): "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Thus, Jesus considered faith to be a work. According to the logic given above, faith can have nothing to do with salvation. Clearly something is wrong.

What is wrong is that both the major premise and the minor premise are false. However, they are half true. Let's explore the half that is true and attempt to adjust them so that they can be of value to us.

Two passages are usually quoted to support the major premise: Titus 3:5 and Ephesians 2:8-9. Let us study what these passages actually teach and modify our major premise appropriately. Consider first Titus 3:4-7:

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 Spirit; 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.

There are several kinds of works: (1) works purely devised and executed by God, (2) works devised of God but executed by man, and (3) works purely devised and executed by man. Question: which one of these three is the apostle Paul talking about when he said "not by works" above. Let's consider them in turn:

1. A simple reading indicates that Paul could not possibly be talking about works which

purely devised and executed by God: "Not by works of righteousness which *we have done.*"

2. Those who believe in faith only believe that Paul was talking about the second alternative which we have proposed: works devised (and commanded) by God which are then executed by men. However, if this is true and we are not saved by such works, then either we are:
- a) saved by works which are purely devised and executed by man (see alternative 3 below), or
 - b) we are saved by works purely devised and executed by God.

We know of no one who purports to believe the bible who accepts alternative "a" as being reasonable. However, the *only* other alternative is "b." This was the only conclusion that Calvin could come to, and it is the logical conclusion if it is sinful to be obedient to God. But how can anyone possibly believe such a thing -- every page of God's word screams that this is erroneous.

3. The *only* other alternative is that the works which are condemned in Titus 3:4-7 are those which are devised and executed by man. This is obtained by the process of elimination detailed above. However, even without this reasoning, the plain reading of the passage in its context indicates this.

Before leaving this passage, let us continue to the very next verse (Titus 3:8): "[This is] a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." Why should we be careful to maintain good works if they have nothing to do with our salvation. "These things are good and profitable unto men" because they lead to our salvation. It is never counterproductive to obey God!

Calvin knew that we could not have it both ways. Either there are conditions to salvation or there are none. If there are any conditions of salvation at all, then we must observe all that God has set forth as conditions. Why do we recognize faith to be a condition of salvation without recognizing repentance. If we recognize repentance, why not confession? And if any of these, they why not baptism? Indeed, baptism is stated to be a condition of entry into Christ and His kingdom several times as often as these other conditions. At least Calvin was consistent when he renounced *all* conditions of salvation and declared that we are saved by the irresistible grace of God which is totally beyond our control.

The same reasoning applies to Ephesians 2:8-9: "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." Condemned are the works originated by man. The works of God which we do by faith are not of ourselves, *they are of God.* We cannot boast about keeping God's commandments and still keep them (this is an oxymoron). Again, when we read on we

find that the very purpose of this admonition is to prompt us to walk in the works of God (Eph. 2:10): "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Let us conclude by adjusting the syllogism with which we opened this section:

1. Major premise: Salvation is conditioned on commands which originated in the mind of God,
2. Minor premise: Scriptural baptism is a commanded operation of God which originated in the mind of God; therefore
3. Conclusion: Scriptural baptism is essential to our salvation in that a failure to comply with this simple act clearly demonstrates a lack of faith in His promises.

4.3.2 THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

The reasoning applied is given by the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: If one "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation,
2. Minor premise: The thief on the cross is an exception; therefore
3. Conclusion: Baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation.

By "exception to baptism" we mean that someone is stated to be saved who has clearly not been baptized. While the above syllogism is logically correct, we will show that the minor premise is clearly false, and therefore the conclusion does not follow.

First, however, it does us well to examine the major premise. Those who make the argument based upon the thief on the cross do so in full recognition that they cannot identify one other individual in the New Testament who was stated to have been saved who had not allowed himself or herself to be subjected to scriptural baptism. This itself is very powerful evidence in favor of baptism being a condition of salvation, especially if the argument based upon the thief is not valid.

We also wish to state emphatically that we recognize that ultimate judgment rests with God. If God wants to make an exception, then in His infinite wisdom and mercy, He certainly has the right to. Our intent is not to put God in a box -- it is to better understand and teach what He has stated in the New Testament. Those who teach others to stake their salvation on the thief on the cross need to study this closely and determine if they

are not going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.")

Let us begin our study by reviewing the scriptures which record the event of concern. It is given in Luke 23:39-43: "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, dost thou not fear God, seeing that thou are in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly, for we received the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Let us take this last sentence to mean that Jesus wanted both the penitent thief and us to know that the thief was saved. We feel that this is the most reasonable meaning of "today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Further, we agree that if the thief was baptized at all it would probably have been by the authority of John the baptist. Jesus' disciples baptized (see John 3:23-30, 4:1-2), but this was not the same as that commanded on Pentecost, because Jesus had not yet died on the cross.

This proves the point. If baptism were a requirement prior to the death of Jesus on the cross, then there is no evidence that the thief was not baptized by Jesus' disciples. But it was not a requirement. There is no evidence in the New Testament that anyone was "baptized into Christ" prior to the day of Pentecost (which is recorded in Acts 2). Those who lived prior to Jesus death on the cross lived under the Old Testament law, and baptism was not part of the Old Testament law. Thus, the specific terms of salvation of the thief on the cross is irrelevant to the terms of our salvation today.

If we are going to use figures who lived under the Old Testament law to make exceptions to those conditions of salvation which God has established for us today, then we could use Noah or Abraham. While, in general, God expects the same faithfulness of us as he does of them (God is no respecter of persons), yet we demonstrate this faithfulness in completely different ways. It would not be a demonstration of faith on my part today to build an arc or to offer my son as a sacrifice to God. Yet, if these men failed to do that they would not be listed in Hebrews 11 as men of faith.

It is easy to be sidetracked into simplistic explanations which support preconceived ideas. Let us restate the accurate syllogism that applies:

1. Major premise: If one "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation,
2. Minor premise: The thief on the cross is not an exception since he did not live under the

New Testament and neither are there any exceptions after the day of pentecost which is recorded in Acts 2; therefore

3. Conclusion: Baptism is essential to salvation.

If this conclusion does not follow then our entry into Christ is different from those in the first century, as we saw in Section 4.2 above. If this were the case there would be something in the New Testament to this effect. In the absence of it, we cannot go beyond God's word in our teaching.

4.3.3 PAUL NOT SENT TO BAPTIZE

Endless bogus arguments can be made by taking verses out of context. A classic example of this is 1 Corinthians 1:17: "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."

Was Paul stating that baptism was of secondary importance? ... that it was not a command? If so, this would be quite contradictory to the dozens of passages which were presented in Section 4.2. However, there is no contradiction. When we place this passage in its context we see exactly what Paul was trying to say, and it does not de-emphasize baptism in any way.

To show this, let us first consider the entire context (1 Corinthians 1:10-17):

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 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.

This is a very informative and enlightening passage which has little to do with the doctrine of baptism. Let us analyze it in detail to see exactly what Paul was trying to communicate to the Corinthians:

1. First, the subject is not baptism, it is division. Clearly, the Corinthians were denominating -- they were dividing the church and calling these different groups by distinctly different names. It is interesting that calling a denomination after Paul was condemned even though Paul was an apostle and his inspired writings and speech had the full weight of the commandments of Christ (1 Cor. 14:37: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord"). But then, even those who claimed "I am of Christ" for the purpose of making distinctions within the Lord's church were condemned for this.
2. "Is Christ divided?" This rhetorical question would be answered in the affirmative by denominationalists. The obvious answer is no; *Christ is not divided*. The body of Christ is not divided. At some point when such divisions arise the organization so divided ceases to be the body of Christ.
3. "... was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" This begins to get at the context of the 17th verse which is at issue here. These rhetorical questions necessarily infer that the readers, the Corinthian Christians, were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and not in the name of Paul. Thus, they should only call themselves Christians (1 Peter 4:16) and not Paulites or any other name to distinguish themselves from one another. This does not diminish the importance of baptism in any way. In fact, the very mention of it in this context emphasizes its importance as the act which distinguishes Christians from those of the world.
4. "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." This is a statement of frustration on the part of Paul, since it is evident that the Corinthians were calling themselves and dividing themselves over those who had baptized them. *Who* baptizes you is not important. The important thing is that it is done in obedience to (in the name of) Jesus Christ. The fact that Paul cannot remember who he baptized further illustrates this point -- whether a person were baptized by Paul or some other Christian has no relevance to that person's salvation!
5. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel ..." The role of the apostle Paul was preach the new truth that was specifically given to him through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit -- the gospel of Christ. Any Christian could baptize, it did not take an apostle to do that. And there was always the danger of someone trying to exalt themselves by saying that they were baptized by the apostle Paul. (Perhaps this is the reason that Jesus did not baptize -- John 4:2.) Thus, there was probably an advantage to Paul avoiding the performance of baptisms.

6. "... not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."
This does not relate to baptism. It introduces a contrast between the "word of the cross" and the "wisdom of words" which is another expression for the wisdom of man. This subject continues through the end of Chapter 4.

In summary, the context clearly shows that the apostle Paul was not trying to de-emphasize baptism, he was trying to de-emphasize the baptizer.

4.3.4 CONVERSIONS WHICH DO NOT MENTION BAPTISM

We stated that every detailed case of conversion included the specific mention of baptism as the culminating act which put the convert into Christ. There are a few conversions in which baptism is not explicitly mentioned. Let us consider these to determine if this creates authority for us to place baptism into the secondary role which it has assumed in the denominational world today. Since all of the cases of conversion are in the book of Acts, all we need to do is scour this book to find them.

The first such situation is given in Acts 11:19-21: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." This is certainly not a detailed case of conversion. "Believed" and "turned to the Lord" are general terms which infer that they (in the words of John the baptist -- Mat. 3:8) "brought forth fruits worthy of repentance." What does it mean, "believed" and they "turned to the Lord." The only way that we can tell is to examine others who believed and turned to the Lord and examine what they did. This is what we did when we examined the detailed cases of conversion given above.

Acts 13:12 presents another case: "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Again, a living faith is one which motivates the convert to be obedient to God's will.

While the above two passages do not pose any great difficulty, the next occurrence does. We place it in its context (Acts 13:44-48):

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but

seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, [saying], I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

The last verse infers that because they were ordained to eternal life, they believed. However, this is not a necessary inference. It could equally be read: as many as believed were ordained to eternal life. Of course, there is a sense in which faith is a gift of God in that if God had not revealed His word to us, we would not have faith (Rom. 10:17). However, God has made this gift available to all people of all nations -- "whosoever will may come" (Rev. 22:17).

Again in Acts 14:1 we have a situation which is not detailed: "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." Recognize that there is no inference that these people did not hear, repent, confess or subject themselves to baptism. The fact that it says that they believed is not evidence that they were saved by faith only any more than a statements of cases of baptism infer that they were saved by baptism only. Since repentance, confession and baptism are motivated by faith, a statement that they believed infers that they performed these simple acts of faithful obedience. And, just a few verses (Acts 14:22) later Paul and Barnabas are said to be "Confirming the souls of the disciples, [and] exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." It is not enough to just "begin in the faith;" we must also "continue in the faith."

Another set of non-detailed cases of conversions is given in Acts 17:10-12: "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming [thither] went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." Their faith, in this case, is attributable to their searching the scriptures to assure that the teachings of the apostle Paul were correct. No details with regard to these teachings are presented in this general case of conversion. The New Testament scriptures, however, adequately furnish with all of these teachings as well as all others that we need so that we can understand "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Another case is given in Acts 17:32-34: "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this [matter]. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which [was] Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others

with them."

Another interesting case demonstrates that the impersonation of the miraculous allegedly in the name of Jesus is nothing new. It is also one of the most humorous stories in the New Testament (Acts 19:13-20):

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of [one] Sceva, a Jew, [and] chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 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 showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all [men]: and they counted the price of them, and found [it] fifty thousand [pieces] of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Each case of conversion illustrates a different component of salvation. In this case the aspect emphasized is repentance, and it is illustrated by the way in which these people separated themselves from their past sins. This is not done to de-emphasize any other of God's commands. When we put all of the scriptures together we get the entire picture of what God wants us to do and be (Mt. 4:4).

One final example of baptism not being mentioned is quite enlightening. Consider Acts 26:24-29, which occurred after a rather lengthy sermon which Paul preached to Festus and King Agrippa:

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

King Agrippa believed; Paul said "I know that thou believest." He gave the reason: "For

the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." But this was the same type of belief that James spoke of when he said: "the demons also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). It is a dead faith -- faith devoid of any actions to demonstrate that it exists.

This returns to the subject of Chapter 3. The statement that someone believes infers that that person is obedient to God. Denominational teachers would have us believe that it necessarily implies just the opposite. They would have us believe that because the above cases of conversion do not mention other acts of obedience that this necessarily implies that these acts of obedience are not required. Some (admittedly extremists) go so far as to teach that any performance of such acts are sinful and will preclude a person from salvation.

What should we teach? Should we ignore all of the cases of conversion as well as the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (many of which are documented in Section 4.2 above)? Are we going to allow those cases where Luke recorded that people "believed" to set all of these teaching aside? Or are we going to believe that the bible is inconsistent? Consistency demands that the statement that certain individuals believed infers that they were obedient to whatever commands of God that they knew and understood. If there is any doubt at all about this, reread Hebrews 11.

4.3.5 IF A PERSON GOT KILLED ON THE WAY TO HIS BAPTISM ...

One of the most persuasive arguments against the necessity of baptism has nothing to do with scriptural argumentation. It is launched with a single definitive emotional argument: "Do you mean that someone was on the way to their baptism and got killed that they would be lost."

Actually, I don't. But what I believe is of little consequence to anyone but me. *It is what the bible teaches that counts.* Since the bible does not deal with this exceptional circumstance, neither can we state anything definitively on it. The bible never gives an example of where a person believes and is on the way to render obedience to God in baptism and gets killed; thus, it does not specifically tell us God's judgment on such a case.

The problem, however, is not what opinions that we hold with regard to this hypothetical case. There are many such hypotheticals which the bible does not detail for us. For us to draw conclusions and base doctrine on these is clearly going beyond that which is written, and it is condemned (1 John 9). That *is* the problem. For an entire body of doctrine is based upon the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: If one circumstance which constitutes an "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation,
2. Minor premise: A person who is killed while on their way to being baptized is saved; therefore
3. Conclusion: Baptism is not essential to salvation.

Let us determine if this is sound reasoning.

First, consider the major premise. This is an assumption of legalism which those opposed to baptism would never espouse unless it served their own ends. In reality, *God* has the full right to make exceptions as He sees fit (which, in reality, would be both perfectly righteous and just). That is not the point. The point is that *we* have absolutely no right to make such exceptions and base doctrines upon them. Thus, there is no guarantee that the major premise is true. We might dream up any number of reasons that God might under some special circumstance not require baptism (such as the total absence of sufficient water). Admittedly such are far fetched, and we are not teaching that God does allow them as exceptions. We are only stating that the fact that He *would* does not mean that the rest of us who are not subject to these exceptions are free from those requirements that we can meet.

Consider as a real example given in Romans 10:9: "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." If a person does not have a voice, he cannot possibly be able to confess Jesus with his mouth. This person would not be lost. However, this does not in any way alter our responsibility to confess Jesus with the mouth. Can we refuse to confess Christ because those who are prevented from it are excused? Such logic is totally unreasonable when applied to confession. What makes it any more logical when applied to baptism?

Now let us turn to the minor premise: A person who is killed while on their way to being baptized is saved. There is no assurance that this is true. The fact that we believe it does not make it true. We saw that the bible teaches several steps prior to the act which puts the believer into Christ. Baptism must be preceded by hearing, belief, repentance and confession of belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It would be equally valid to apply this reasoning to any of these steps: A person who is killed while on his way to confessing, repentance, belief, hearing ... where do we draw the line?

Suppose a person is killed on their way to attending gospel preaching in which Jesus will be preached and they would render full obedience to the gospel and be saved. Is that person saved? If so, does this mean that there is no need to hear the gospel preached?

As the old wise man once said: "That's whittling on God's end of the stick." If God wishes to make exceptions, that is His business. I cannot teach such because the bible does not teach any. We believe in the perfect justice and the perfect grace of God. I do not need to get into the business of God's judgment in order to preach the word of God. I just need to state what the bible has said with as much love as I can. This we have done as best we can by presenting the teachings of the New Testament in Section 4.2 above. The convoluted logic of this section does not set that aside. Rather, it is an attempt of those whose worldly interests are best served from such deceit.

Since neither the major nor the minor premises can be determined to be true, the conclusion can certainly not be inferred or proven in any way. The bible teaches that baptism is essential to salvation and to teach otherwise constitutes the gravest disservice that we can render our fellow man.

4.4 IS THIS IMPORTANT?

We hardly believe that you would have read to this point if you did not believe that this is important. However, it is not the misunderstanding of God's word that is the greatest enemy of the truth. It is the pure complacency that most people have for scriptural doctrine. They reason: "As long as I am a good person, isn't that enough? The bible, after all, is just common sense. I am a loving person and that is what God really wants."

This is not the reasoning of an evil person. But it is the reasoning of one who feels that he or she is justified by works. Being a good, loving person is not enough. We all need the blood of Christ for our justification. The terms and conditions for having that blood wash away our sins are set by God, not man. These are clearly presented in the scriptures referenced above. Those who think this is a skewed presentation should read the entire New Testament for themselves. Those who agree should also be skeptical and verify not only that truthful conclusions are being taught, but also that scriptures are being applied properly and truthfully.

Please review this chapter and as you do recognize that baptism is not the issue here! *The issue is faith in God and His word.* Do we believe what he said or don't we? Are we going to take Him at His word, or aren't we? Baptism is easy. It requires virtually no effort on our part. It is an arbitrary thing. Those who are going to associate with some church are going to be baptized at some time in some way and for some reason. Why not do it God's way and for God's reasons? If we cannot practice scriptural baptism in all of its simplicity, what can we practice? If we refuse to follow God's will on this simple thing, what is going to happen in those moral issues which require tremendous faith on our part? When we look at the collective morality of our country, we must ask: Is our slide

into immorality caused by the same refusal to obey God that leads us to accept this myth of denominationalism instead of regarding baptism with the importance that God gave it?

In the next chapter we discuss another myth that so often diverts attention away from God's word and toward subjective self-direction: the idea that love is all you need.