

October 14, 2004

LOOKING AT BAPTISM FROM THE GREEK

The New Testament teaching concerning baptism gets in the way of some very popular theological theories, and for that reason the teaching is often neglected. Nonetheless, baptism is important. It is important because it occupies a crucial place in the New Testament with regards to conversion, and no serious Bible student should ignore it.

Every person that reads the New Testament encounters baptism again and again. It sticks out as ancient bones stick out of the ground, which bear witness to earlier things; and many theologians stumble over these “bones.”

These notes have been written at the request of one of my grandsons, Ben Walker, who was seeking information about baptism from the Greek for a friend of his.

The method that I have used in preparing these notes has been to write out the relevant Greek verses and look at them carefully. Sometimes I printed the verses out with the help of the “Quick Verse” computer program, which was graciously supplied to me by Dr. Harold Higginbottom. At other times, I copied out the relevant passages by hand. (I find that when a passage is written out on paper, it lies quietly before me and does not dance around, as it otherwise might. This seems to help me catch the broader meaning of the passage, as well as some of its nuances.)

I want to state emphatically that the Greek word “baptizein” from which the English expression “to baptize”

comes, means “to dip” or “to immerse” someone (or something) in water (or in some other liquid). This word shows that baptism was originally performed by immersion, and there is no doubt about this. If anyone has any doubts about it, let him look in any Greek lexicon under the word “baptizo,” and he will see that what I say is true.

The English clerics, who brought forth the King James Bible in 1611, could not bring themselves to translate “baptizein” as “to immerse,” because neither the English church nor the Roman church practiced baptism by immersion. The normal practice of both of these churches was (and still is) to sprinkle a little water on the head of a person brought to them for baptism. Therefore, the clerics that prepared the King James Bible simply appropriated the Greek word and made an English word out of it. The average person at that time was mostly in the dark as to the origin of the word “*baptize*,” and I fear that many people are still in the dark about it today.

The purpose of this study is to look at what the authors of the New Testament said about baptism. I have used Roman letters in writing out Greek words, but readers acquainted the Greek language will have no difficulty identifying the Greek words.

The English quotations are from the New King James Version, Copyright * 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. I used the NKJV because its wording follows the Greek a little more closely than some of the other versions.

Matthew 3:4-6

“And John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”

John the Baptist was a very great man. He appeared in the attire and manner of Elijah the prophet. Jesus said that John the Baptist was not only a prophet but “*more than a prophet*” (Matthew 11:9). Jesus also said, “*Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist*” (Matthew 11:11).

John was the first person in the New Testament to preach and practice baptism. The response that people made to his work was great.

Mark began his Gospel with a narration of the work of John the Baptist. Mark wrote, “*John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*”(Mark 1:4). John’s message was that people should repent and be baptized. Therefore, his baptism is called a “*baptism of repentance*” (baptisma metanoias). The apostle Paul also characterized John’s baptism as a “*baptism of repentance*”(Acts 13:24; Acts 19:4).

John the Baptist was very specific about what he understood repentance to be. He told people possessing food and clothing to share what they had with those that had none (Luke 3:11). He told tax collectors to collect no more than was due them (Luke 3:13). He told soldiers, “*Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages*” (Luke 3:14). He urged people to

repent, “*for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2).

John the Baptist’s baptism was not only a “*baptism of repentance*,” but it was also a baptism “*for the remission of sins*” (eis aphesis hamartion). The thought that baptism should be for the remission of sins is offensive to a lot of people today, but the truth of the matter is that John the Baptist and Jesus’ apostles all preached baptism for the remission of sins.

It is wrong to say that the expression “*for remission of sins*” (eis aphesis harmation) in Mark 1:4 should be translated “because of the remission of sins.” “Eis aphesis hamartion” does not mean “because of the remission of sins.” It means “*unto the remission of sins*.” See the comments under Acts 2:38-39 on pages 16-19 of this paper.

From Jerusalem and from all over Judea, people went out to John the Baptist, and he baptized them “*in the Jordan River*” (en to Iordanee potamo). The use of the preposition “en” with the dative case reveals where the baptizings took place. They took place in the Jordan River. The wording of this passage is compatible with the thought that John the Baptist baptized by immersion.

It is interesting to note that people came to John, “*confessing their sins*” (exomologoumenoi tas hamartias auton) (Matthew 3:6).

Matthew 3:13-16

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me? But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately

from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.”

Jesus was aware that John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, and He went out to John “*to be baptized by him*” (tou baptistheenai hup’ autou). The Greek article “*to*” is in the genitive case, which, when used with an infinitive, generally expresses purpose. This tells us that Jesus did not go out to inspect John’s work or to hear his message. He went out for the expressed purpose of getting John, and no other, to baptize Him. By doing this, Jesus showed His appreciation for John as a person, for his work, and for the importance of baptism.

John the Baptist felt, however, that he was not worthy of the honor of baptizing Jesus. He also knew that Jesus did not need to be baptized for the remission of sins, as other people did. John was not so sure about himself, for he said, “*I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?*” Jesus replied, “*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*”

Jesus was not content to be just a little righteous; rather, He wanted “*to fulfill all righteousness*” (pleerosai pasan dikaikosuneen). Jesus felt that it was “*fitting*” that He should be baptized. Indeed, it was fitting, for if He had not been baptized, people would still today be saying, “Jesus was not baptized; therefore, I do not need to be.”

The proper response to Jesus’ having been baptized should be, “If Jesus, who committed no sins, was baptized, how much more should I be.”

After Jesus was baptized, He “*came up immediately from the water*” (anabee apo tou hudatos). Literally, He came “up away” from the water. This shows that Jesus was

in the water at the time He was baptized. It also shows that John was in the water, too. So the wording of Matthew 3:16 is compatible with the idea of Jesus' having been baptized by being dipped or immersed in water.

An additional account of Jesus' being baptized is found in Mark 1:9-11. This account says that Jesus was baptized "eis ton Jordaneen" (into the Jordan). The wording gives the picture of Jesus going down into the river. This account also is compatible with the idea of Jesus' having been dipped or immersed in water.

The Gospel of Luke informs us that the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus after He was baptized (baptisthentos) and while He was praying (Luke 3:21-22). "Baptisthentos" is an aorist passive participle, which shows that the baptizing was already over with when the Holy Spirit fell on Jesus. Not even upon Jesus did the Holy Spirit descend before He was baptized.

Matthew 28:18-20

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.'"

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He came to His apostles in Galilee and said to them, "*All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.*" He added, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.*"

Jesus then gave His apostles instructions as to how they should go about making disciples: The first thing was to go to all the nations. The participle "poreuthentes" (going) is in the aorist tense. It shows that the apostles had

to “go” before they could make disciples of all nations. Jesus also said, “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

The Greek word for “*baptizing*”(baptizontes) is a present participle. It shows action that is contemporary with the verb with which it goes. So, Jesus told His apostles that while they were in the process of making people into disciples, they should baptize them. From this we learn that baptizing people is a part of the process of making them into disciples of Jesus. There is not even a hint in Jesus’ words that the nations could become His disciples without their being baptized. From Jesus’ point of view, being baptized was an integral part of becoming disciples.

The King James Version and the New King James say that Jesus gave instruction to His apostles to baptize people “*in the name of*” the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Greek text in this verse, however, does not say “*in the name of.*” It says “into the name of” (eis to onoma). There is a difference between “in” and “into.” The one shows location, while the other shows movement toward (or entrance into) something. The apostles were instructed to baptize people into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That is, they should baptize people to put them into a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The relationship would be established in baptism.

Not only should the disciples baptize people, but they should also teach them. Jesus said, “*teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*” The word “didaskontes” (teaching) is also a present participle. It

modifies the main verb “matheeteusate” (*make disciples*) and shows that teaching is a part of turning people into disciples.

Jesus told His apostles to teach people “*to observe all things* (panta hosa) *that I have commanded you.*” They should teach people to keep “*everything*” (panta) that He had commanded them. There is a little word in the Greek here, which does not come through strongly enough in English. It is the word “hosa,” which means “as much as.” Jesus emphasized that His disciples should teach the people to keep as much--no more, no less—as He had taught them. It is a too bad that this emphasis is lost in translation.

Jesus also promised that if His apostles would do as He commanded, He would be with them until “*the end* (sunteleias) *of the age.*” The extent of the duration of this promise (“*to the end of the age*”) shows that Jesus commissioned not only His eleven apostles but also His followers of today to take the gospel to all nations.

Mark 16:15-16

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’”

Following Jesus’ resurrection, He appeared to the eleven apostles while they sat eating. He said to them, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*” The Greek word for “*preach*” is “keeruxate,” which means, “to proclaim” as a herald. “Keeruxate” is in the imperative mood (the command form), which indicates that Jesus did not merely advise His apostles to preach; He commanded them to preach. They were to preach the

“*gospel*” (euangelion). The Greek word “euangelion” means “good news.”

Indeed, the apostles had a lot of good news to share. They were to proclaim that Jesus had died for all, and that He had arisen from the grave. This was exciting news. It suggested that the bonds of sin and death had been broken. The apostles were to tell the good news “*to every creature*” (pasee tee ktisei). The expression “*every creature*” does not include the animal kingdom. It means that they were to proclaim the gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Jesus knew that some people would listen to the good news, believe it, and ask for baptism. Therefore, He said, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved.*” The Greek expression for “*will be saved*” is “sotheesetai,” which is a verb in the future tense. Observe, please, that both believing and being baptized go before being saved. The Greek word for “*believes*” is “pisteusas,” and the Greek word for “*is baptized*” is “baptistheis.” Both of these Greek words are aorist participles. Being in the aorist tense, they both show action prior to the action of the main verb, which is “sotheesetai.” The resultant thought is that both a person’s believing and a person’s being baptized precede a person’s being saved. This thought should give pause to anyone who thinks that believing is important but that baptism is not important.

Jesus knew that when people heard the “good news” it would place a decision before them. He knew that some of them would not believe the gospel and would, therefore, be condemned. So He said, “*But he who does not believe will be condemned.*” The fact that some people do not believe shuts off their way of escape from the condemnation under

which they stand. (See John 3:17-18.) The expression “*will be condemned*” is a translation of the Greek verb “*katakritheesetai*,” which is the future passive form of “*katakrino*.” “*Katakrino*” means to condemn. In the Greek New Testament, “*katakrino*” refers frequently to the last judgment, and this may be its meaning here.

Not only did Jesus identify the person (or persons) that would be saved, but He also identified the person (or persons) that would be condemned. He said, “*but he who does not believe will be condemned.*” So, according to Jesus, it takes two things (belief and baptism) for a person to be saved, but it takes only one thing (disbelief) for a person to be condemned.

I have heard people say, “If baptism is essential, why did Jesus not say, ‘He who does not believe and IS NOT BAPTIZED will be condemned?’” Well, for one thing, it was not necessary for Jesus to say that, because He did not envision that any nonbeliever would want to be baptized.

Further, if Jesus had said, “he that does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned,” those words would have been subject to gross misunderstanding. Those words would have meant that it takes two things to make a person liable for condemnation. If Jesus had spoken in that way, it would have implied that if a person lacked either one of those negative qualifications, he would not be liable for condemnation. That would support the thinking of people who want to believe but who do not want to be baptized; for it would free them from condemnation, as they desire. But it would also have some unforeseen consequences: It would free any nonbelievers from condemnation, who went ahead and got baptized even though they did not believe.

So if Jesus had said, “He that does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned,” the easiest way for a person to avoid condemnation would be for him not to believe the gospel but to get baptized anyway.

Luke 7:29-30

“And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

Most of the leaders of the Jews did not approve of what John the Baptists was doing, nor did they believe that God had sent him (Matthew 21:25). John’s call for the high and mighty people to repent offended them. Lowly people, however, accepted John as a prophet (Matthew 21:26). Some tax collectors, who were generally despised by the people, respected John the Baptist, in spite of the fact that he told them, “*Collect no more than what is appointed for you*” (Luke 3:13); for they knew that John’s message was just.

Luke said that the tax collectors “*justified God*” (edikaiosan ton theon) by allowing themselves to be baptized (baptisthentes) by John (Luke 7:29). That is, they agreed that God is righteous. “Baptisthentes” is an aorist participle. It shows that the baptism of the tax collectors proceeded their fully justifying God. This suggests that their “justifying” God was contingent upon their being baptized.

The text says that the tax collectors were baptized with “*the baptism of John*” (to baptisma Ioannou). The fact that the expression “to baptisma” is in the accusative case

defines the limit, or the specificity, of their being baptized. It was not just any baptism. It was John's baptism, and it differed from the usual run of ceremonial washings that were done by the Jews.

The Pharisees and lawyers, on the other hand, did not justify God. They "*rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.*" By refusing to be baptized by John, they rejected the will of God "*for themselves.*" The expression "*for themselves*" (eis heautous) suggests that it was precisely for proud people like the Pharisees and the lawyers that John's baptism was designed; but they "*rejected*" (eetheteesan) it. Surely, there is a message here for any haughty person of today, who feels that Christian baptism is beneath him.

John 3:22-23

"After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized."

Sometime after Jesus had spoken with Nicodemus, He and His disciples left Jerusalem and came into Judea, where they stayed for a time, baptizing people. Jesus was not baptizing people personally; His disciples were doing it (John 4:2).

John the Baptist, at the time, was baptizing at Aenon near Salim. He baptized at Aenon "*because there was much water there*" (hoti hudata polla een ekei). The comment to be made is rather obvious. If John only sprinkled a littler water on the heads of people, he would

not need “*much water.*” If, on the other hand, he were baptizing by immersion, he would need a lot of water.

John 4:1-3

“Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.”

Jesus was very successful in making disciples and baptizing people and the Pharisees got wind of it. When Jesus became aware that they had heard of His success, He left off working in Judea and returned to Galilee.

We do not know all that Jesus was telling the people in Judea about baptism. We do know that some of His teaching echoed the words of John the Baptist. Jesus preached, among other things, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 4:17), just as John was preaching.

I suspect that the baptizing that Jesus’ disciples were doing was similar to John’s baptism. If that is true, it would suggest that Jesus was also preaching a “*baptism of repentance,*” as John was doing (Mark 1:4), and that the baptizing that Jesus was doing was also “*for the remission of sins.*”

It would appear, then, that the baptisms that Jesus’ disciples performed worked only retroactively, just as John’s baptisms did. Such a baptism cleansed people of past sins, but it does not appear to have established a new relationship for the future, as Christian baptism does.

The people that were baptized at this stage of the unfolding of God’s plan were not “*baptized into Christ*”

Jesus” (Romans 6:3), nor were they “*buried with Him though baptism into death*” (Romans 6:4), for Jesus had not yet died and had not yet been placed in his tomb. In addition, they were not baptized into the “*one body*” (1 Corinthians 12:13), because the church (the body of Christ) had not yet been established.

Acts 2:38-39

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’”

The people who heard the Apostle Peter speak on the day of Pentecost had their consciences pricked by what he said. They cried out, “*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*”

Peter commanded them, “*Repent.*” This meant not only that they should be sorry for having consented to the death of Jesus, but also that they should make a sincere effort to change the way they lived.

The Greek word “*metanoeo*” implies a change of mind. It means that people should reorient their thinking, so as to be able to change their actions. “*Metanoeo*” is the same word that is found in the message of John the Baptist, who said, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2).

Peter’s call for repentance implied that his listeners were capable of doing something to alter their guilty state. It was not necessary for them to wait around for God’s Holy Spirit to change them.

The message that the apostle Peter spoke at Pentecost is sorely needed today. Bible teachers and preachers should not leave the impression that people can come to God, and receive His forgiveness, without first changing their attitude toward sin in their lives.

The apostle Peter used the expression “*every one of you*” (hekastos humon), which emphasizes the responsibility that each person has to get himself or herself baptized. Contrast this with today. A preacher of today often has to plead with people to allow themselves to be baptized, but it should be the other way around. People should be pleading with a preacher to baptize them.

The Greek word “*baptistheeto*” (be baptized) in Peter’s speech is in the imperative (command form) mood, showing it was the people’s responsibility to get baptized. This does not mean, of course, that they should baptize themselves by dipping themselves in water. The word “*baptistheeto*” is in the passive voice, which shows that the recipients of baptism are passive and must get someone to help them. Nothing in the Christian system is less work-like than baptism.

BAPTISM UPON THE NAME OF JESUS

The apostle Peter told the people to be baptized, as most translations say, “*in the name of Jesus Christ.*” The Greek text of this verse, however, does not have “en to onomati,” which would mean “*in the name of.*” What the Greek text has is “epi to onomati,” which literally means, “upon the name of.”

“In the name of” might imply some sort of a ceremony, but *“upon the name of Jesus Christ”* explains why a person should get baptized. He should do it upon Jesus’ authority.

There is no reason to find a contradiction between Peter’s words on Pentecost and what Jesus said in commissioning His apostles. Peter told the people to be baptized upon the name (authority) of Jesus (Acts 2:38), while Jesus told His apostles to baptize people into the name (eis to onoma) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Peter’s words were spoken to explain to people why they should submit to baptism. Jesus’ words were spoken to explain to His apostles why they should baptize people: The apostles were to baptize people in order to bring them into a loving relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

The apostle Peter told the people that they should be baptized *“for the remission of your sins”* (eis aphasin ton hamartion humon). Baptism for remission of sins is a highly controversial topic of discussion, today. Not so, however, in the days of the New Testament. Then, all baptisms were for a cleansing of some kind.

There is discussion today as to whether the apostle Peter meant for people to be baptized BECAUSE their sins had been remitted, or IN ORDER to get their sins remitted. No discussion on this point should be necessary, however, because the preposition *“eis,”* when used with the accusative case, indicates *“direction toward,” “unto,”* or

“into.” There is no way that the expression “eis aphesin” (*for the remission of sins*) can mean “because of the remission of sins.”

In order to check this out, I looked in a book called “The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament” under the heading “eis.” I found that “eis” is used over 1,700 times in the New Testament. As I looked down the list of Scriptures, I found that “eis” is used to mean “toward,” “unto,” or “into.” I think that anyone would have difficulty finding even one instance where the word “eis” means “because of” except perhaps, as some suppose, in the case of Matthew 3:11. Let us look at Matthew 3:11.

In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist said, “*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*” It sounds strange to our ears, of course, that John the Baptist would say that he baptized people unto repentance. Normally, we think of repentance as preceding baptism, not following it. So how can John’s words be understood? A possible explanation may be that John was giving his personal motivation for being out in the wilderness baptizing people. He wanted to get people to repent, for he knew that the kingdom of heaven was just around the corner; and he wanted people to be ready for it. His getting people to repent may have been the hardest part of his task. His getting them to be baptized does not appear to have been all that difficult, for Jewish people in those days were accustomed to ceremonial washings. (I do not mean to suggest that John’s baptism was merely a

ceremonial). What I am suggesting is that a baptism was nothing unusual for them; they were used to it. Indeed, the people who came to John may have already been baptized for various reasons before they came to him. John's message was that people should show "*fruits worthy of repentance*" (Luke 3:8), in preparation for the kingdom (Matthew 3:2). For that reason they should be baptized for "*the forgiveness of sins*" (Mark 1:4). However, if someone had asked John, "Why are you out in the wilderness baptizing people?" he might have answered: "Oh, I am out here preaching and baptizing people so they will change the way they live and be ready to accept the kingdom of heaven."

Some theologians use Matthew 3:11 to find justification for translating "eis metanoian" (*unto repentance*) as "because of repentance." They have a special interest in translating it this way, for if "eis metanoian" can mean "because of repentance," it has implications for other Bible passages, especially for Acts 2:38. In Acts 2:38 the apostle Peter urged his listeners to allow themselves to be baptized "*for the remission of sins*" (eis aphesin ton hamartion). Peter's meaning was that the people should be baptized in order to obtain the remission of sins. Protestant theologians, however, do not like the idea of baptism being done to obtain the remission of sins. They prefer that baptism be done, if at all, because of remission of sins, for they believe that salvation comes by faith only.

The English word "for" can have two meanings. It can mean "because of" something that happened. It can also mean "in order for" something to happen. The Greek

word “eis” when used with the accusative case, does not have this duality of meaning. It means “in order for” something to happen.

If “*for the remission of sins*” in Acts 2:38 means “because of remission of sins,” as some theologians maintain, that would indicate that Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost to be baptized because they had already been forgiven. That would mean that the people had received the forgiveness of their sins at some prior time, presumably at the moment they accepted Jesus as “their personal savior.”

The attempt, however, to make the Greek preposition “eis” with the accusative case mean “because of” runs up against the reality of Greek grammar. “Eis” with the accusative does not mean “because of.” Instead, it shows direction “toward,” or “unto,” or “into” something (or someone).

Baptism to obtain remission of sins was nothing new. This is what John the Baptist had preached (Mark 1:4). John was certainly not baptizing people BECAUSE they had already been forgiven. He called some of them, “*Brood of vipers*” (Luke 3:7). John was baptizing people, because they needed to be cleansed so they would be ready to accept the kingdom of heaven when it would be revealed.

Some of the people to whom the apostle Peter spoke on the Day of Pentecost may have been baptized earlier by John the Baptist. I say this because many people from Jerusalem had gone out to be baptized by John. (See Matthew 3:5-6).

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

After Peter finished telling the people on the day of Pentecost to “*repent*” and “*be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,*” he spoke to them of the blessing that would follow. He said, “*And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). The Greek word in this passage for “*gift*” is “*dorea*.” This word is used in the New Testament to refer to different kinds of gifts. Some people think Peter was referring here to the spiritual gifts of a miraculous nature that some early Christians received. Others identify “*the gift,*” of which Peter spoke, with eternal life. Still others think Peter was referring to the giving of the Holy Spirit as such, which opinion I hold. The reason I hold to this opinion is because in the next verse (Acts 2:39) Peter spoke of the Spirit as having been promised. The gift that had been promised in the Old Testament regarding the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Spirit Himself. (See Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28.)

Although the identity of the “*gift*” in this passage may be controversial, one thing is clear: Peter said that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be received on the far side of baptism. That is, it comes AFTER baptism, not before it. This agrees with what the New Testament teaches in general. For instance, Jesus said that the world (i.e. people of the world) could not receive the Holy Spirit (John 14:17). That means that a person would, in some sense, have to be taken out of the world before he could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter (and others) said that God gives the

Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), not to those who had not obeyed Him. In addition, the apostle Paul asked (rhetorically) whether or not the Galatian Christians had received the Spirit by the “*hearing* [i.e. obedience] *of faith*” (Galatians 3:2). The answer is “Yes,” they had received the Spirit as a result of their hearing (in the sense of their harkening to) the teaching of the faith. Paul implied that the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit after they had complied with what God had said.

It would be unreasonable of us to expect that God would send His Holy Spirit into the heart of a person before the blood of Jesus had cleansed that person’s heart. Even if the Holy Spirit were to go into such a heart, He would go right out again, for God’s Holy Spirit could not live in an unholy temple (See 1 Corinthians 6:19). Further, if God were to select only certain individuals for salvation by sending His Spirit into their hearts, that would make Him a respecter of persons; and we know that God is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11). God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9), not just a few.

BEING ADDED TO THE CHURCH

The text in Acts 2:41 says, “*three thousand souls were added*” that day. The same verse also says, “*those who gladly received his [Peter’s] word were baptized.*” This implies that only those people were “*added*” (prosetetheesan) to their number who “*received his word*” (apodexamenoi) and “*were baptized*” (ebaptistheesan).

Notice the order: (1) receiving the word, (2) being baptized, and (3) being added to the fellowship. No one

was added in Jerusalem that did not accept what Peter preached. Indeed, no mention is made anywhere in the New Testament of anyone ever having been added to the fellowship that had not been baptized.

The text also says that “*the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47). Many early Greek manuscripts and some English translations omit the word “church” from Acts 2:47, but its omission makes no difference as far as our present discussion is concerned. The point is that no one was being saved outside of the fellowship, for the process of being saved and being added to the church were the same.

Acts 8:12-13

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”

Saul of Tarsus and others were persecuting the church. This caused many believers to leave Jerusalem. Philip was one of those who went out from Jerusalem. He came to the city of Samaria, where he preached about “*the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus*” and performed miracles. A number of both men and women in Samaria “*believed Philip*” (episteusan to Philippo). That is to say, they trusted Philip and had confidence in what he was saying. As a result, they “*were baptized*” (ebaptizonto). Notice the chain of events: (1) Philip preached, (2) Samaritans believed, and (3) men and women were baptized. This is the pattern that conversions took in New Testament times. Preaching preceded faith, and faith

preceded baptism. Thus faith and baptism are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they go together, because faith leads to baptism.

Acts 8:34-39

“So the eunuch answered Philip and said, ‘I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

There are a number of interesting points in the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. First of all, an angel commanded Philip to go south on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26). The angel did not go himself to preach to the Ethiopian. He sent a human being instead. The human was Philip, who found the Ethiopian riding along in a chariot and reading the Scriptures. The Ethiopian was a Bible-reading man. Such a person is a prime candidate for receiving the message about Jesus. So Philip began where the Ethiopian was reading (Isaiah 53) and “*preached (eueggelisato) Jesus to him.*”

At some point during their conversation, they got around to the subject of baptism. After a while, they came to a place where there was water and the Ethiopian was delighted that they had found water. He said, “*See, here is water.*” He asked Philip, “*What hinders me from being baptized?*” What Philip replied is omitted from many ancient manuscripts, and for that reason, some Bible translations also do not contain his reply. The King James

Bible and the New Kings James Version, however, record that Philip replied, “*If you believe with all your heart, you may.*” The Ethiopian answered, “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*”

As one looks at the conversion stories in Acts of Apostles, one finds a pattern of events. The bedrock on which all conversions are based is, of course, faith in Jesus as the Christ. In addition to faith, a person must be sorry for his or her sins and turn away from them. Every preacher that baptizes a person has the right to know (and the obligation to ask) whether or not the person he is baptizing believes that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), for anyone that does not believe that Jesus is the Christ is not a proper subject for baptism. Also, every preacher has the obligation to warn the person that he is about to baptize that he or she should repent of sins; for if there is no repentance, there will be no forgiveness.

The Ethiopian commanded his chariot to stand still, and both he and Philip “*went down into the water*” (katebeesan amphoteroi eis to hudor), and Philip baptized him. This narrative sheds light on how baptisms were performed in those early days. Both of the persons that were involved went down into the water. None of the attendant circumstances, as described in any of the baptism stories in the New Testament, ever hint that a baptism need not be performed by immersion. All of the attendant circumstances point to immersion.

When the baptism of the Ethiopian was completed, the Ethiopian and Philip “*came up out of the water*” (anebeesan ek tou hudatos), and the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away. The Ethiopian saw Philip no more, yet

he went on his way “*rejoicing*.” His “*rejoicing*” points to one of the most surprising aspects of proper baptism. It brings joy. No one should get baptized, of course, just for the euphoria; but baptism properly performed and rightly understood is one of the most exhilarating experiences that a person can have.

Acts 9:17-18

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.”

After Saul of Tarsus had seen Jesus, he was led into the city of Damascus, where he was without sight for three days, until a man named Ananias came to him. Ananias told Saul that the Lord Jesus had sent him so that he (Saul) might receive his sight and “*be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (pleesthees pneumatōs hagiou). Notice that the Lord was again dealing through a human intermediary. He sent Ananias to Saul.

The Lord could have told Saul what He wanted him to do while He was speaking with him on the road to Damascus, or He could have communicated it to him later; but He did not do so. Instead, He sent Ananias to tell Saul what he should do. This underscores the thought that we have the treasure of the gospel “*earthen vessels*” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Although Saul was privileged to speak with the resurrected Lord, that experience did not take away Saul’s sins. We know this to be true, because Ananias told Saul

afterward, “*Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins*” (Acts 22:16).

Acts 10:44-48

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.”

There was a Roman soldier in Caesarea named Cornelius, who had a vision of an angel speaking to him. The angel instructed Cornelius to send to Joppa and to fetch a man named Simon, who would tell him (Cornelius) what he should do.

So Cornelius sent for Simon Peter, and Peter came to Caesarea. Entering Cornelius’ house, Peter found people assembled there, and he began to speak about Jesus.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all that heard the word. The Jewish believers, who had accompanied Peter were astonished that “*the gift (he dorea) of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 10:45) was “*poured out on the Gentiles also.*” They were amazed to hear Gentiles “*speak with tongues (glossais) and magnify (megalunonton) God,*” as the apostles had done in Jerusalem on Pentecost.

The apostle Peter, however, did not appear to be as surprised as his companions were. No doubt, He remembered that Jesus had commanded him and the other apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), so he immediately drew the

conclusion that the Gentiles at Cornelius' house should become disciples of Jesus. Peter asked, "*Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*"

Peter knew that some of the Jewish Christians might be hesitant to accept Gentiles into the fellowship of the church; yet Peter had come to the conclusion that Jesus wanted Gentiles to be in His church. The fact that the Holy Spirit had fallen on them convinced Peter of this. Peter knew that the way for people to get into the fellowship of the church was by being baptized, so he "*commanded*" (prosetaxen) them to be baptized. Peter did not say to the people, "Be baptized if you feel the need of it, or if you think it is necessary." He commanded it. He laid the responsibility for it on their shoulders.

Irrespective of who performs a baptism, it should be done, as Peter said, "*in the name of (en to onomati) the Lord,*" Jesus Christ. This implies that anyone that baptizes another person should speak some appropriate words to let everyone present know in whose name the baptizing is taking place.

Acts 16:30-34

"And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household."

When Paul and Silas came to Thessalonika, they were thrown into jail. In jail, they prayed and sang hymns in the night, while other prisoners listened.

Suddenly, there was a great earthquake. The prison doors were thrown open, and the prisoners' chains were broken. The jailer awoke with a start and saw the prison doors open. Thinking his prisoners had escaped, he drew his sword and was about to take his life when Paul called with a loud voice, "*Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.*"

The jailer called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"

Paul and Silas replied, "*Believe (pisteuson) on the Lord Jesus (epi ton kurion Jeesoun) Christ, and you will be saved (sotheesee), you and your household.*" The word "*believe*" (pisteuson) is in the command form, which shows that Paul and Silas commanded the jailer to believe. They commanded him to believe "*on the Lord Jesus*" (epi ton kurion Jeesoun). Here, we have the preposition "epi" with the accusative case. The meaning is, "place your faith on the Lord Jesus." Paul and Silas wanted the jailer to accept the fact that Jesus was Lord and Christ. If he could do that, they promised him, "*you will be saved (sotheesee).*" Notice the future tense in "sotheesee." If he (the jailer) could believe that Jesus is Lord, then it would follow that both he and his household would be saved, not at the very instant that he first believed, but as a result of his belief.

There was much that the jailer and his family did not yet know, so Paul and Silas "*spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.*"

There has been some speculation about whether or not there were babies in the jailer's household, and about

whether or not any babies were baptized. No one knows for sure, of course, whether there were babies in the jailer's household or not. If there were babies, it would have been most unusual--even out of character--for Paul and Silas to speak "*the word of the Lord*" to them.

Only after Paul and Silas had finished teaching "*the word of the Lord*," did the jailer take them and wash their wounds. It was then that he and his household were baptized.

The fact that the baptizing took place in "*the same hour of the night*" emphasizes the urgency of baptism.

Afterwards, all of them enjoyed a breakfast together, and the jailer "*rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.*" The words "*having believed*" are translated from the Greek participle "pepisteukos," which is in the perfect tense. The use of perfect tense shows the existence of a condition that had come about as a result of past actions. If we can determine when it was that the jailer rejoiced, we can determine when he had finally become a "believer." Does Luke (who wrote Acts of Apostles) wish to convey the thought that the jailer rejoiced when he first heard that Jesus was the Lord? One could possibly conclude that to be true, but it is more likely that the jailer and his household began to rejoice after they were baptized. This suggests that Luke did not consider the jailer and his household to be full-fledged "believers" until after they were baptized.

Acts 18:8

"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."

When the apostle Paul came to the city of Corinth, he went into the synagogue every Sabbath and reasoned with both Jews and Greeks. As a result, the ruler of the synagogue, a man named Crispus, came to believe in the Lord Jesus, as did his household. Luke wrote that also *“many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”*

The order in which these events happened is significant: (1) The Corinthians heard the gospel. (2) They believed it. (3) Then they were baptized. This is the normal order of events that one finds in the narratives of the conversions in the book of Acts. These events hang together like the links of a chain, one event leading to the other.

The tenses of the Greek verbs here are instructive. The word “akouontes” (hearing) is a present participle. Such a participle describes an action that is concurrent with the action of the verb (or, verbs) with which it goes. This shows that during the time that the Corinthians were still in the process of hearing (listening to) the preaching of the apostle Paul, they started believing and being baptized. This suggests that Paul was preaching continuously. It also suggests that the Corinthians were quick to believe and quick to be baptized.

Two important links of this chain, however, are missing in Luke’s brief narrative. Luke says nothing about the Corinthians’ having repented of their sins or about their having confessed their belief that Jesus is the Christ. Yet it stands to reason that the apostle Paul emphasized both of these things in his preaching, for he reminded the Corinthians in a subsequent letter that some of them had

been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, covetous people, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Paul was too alert to have allowed such people to slip into the kingdom without his having called them to repentance, and he would not have baptized people unless he was sure that they believed that Jesus was the Christ. So, although Luke did not mention repentance and confession of faith, it stands to reason that the Corinthians did both.

Acts 19:1-7

“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John's baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would 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 hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.”

When the apostle Paul returned to Ephesus, after he had been absent for a while, he found about twelve men there that were disciples. He asked them, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” Paul, being an apostle and having the power to lay his hands on people to give them spiritual gifts (Acts 8:18), apparently wanted to know whether or not he should lay his hands on these men and impart to them spiritual gifts of a miraculous nature.

The men answered, “*We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.*” What? How could that be? How could these men not have known that there was a Holy Spirit? They should have received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized (Acts 2:28-39). So Paul

concluded that something was amiss with their baptism, and he asked them, “*Into what then were you baptized?*”

They replied, “*Into John’s baptism.*” So that was the problem. John’s baptism differed from a baptism performed in the name of Jesus. One of the ways it differed was that it did not provide people with the Holy Spirit; but there were other differences as well. Here are some of the differences:

1. In John’s baptism, there was no mention of being buried with Jesus.
2. In John’s baptism, there was no mention of a resurrection to a new life.
3. In John’s baptism, there was no putting on of Jesus Christ.
4. In John’s baptism, there was no new birth.
5. In John’s baptism there was no mention of the Holy Spirit.
6. In John’s baptism, there was no entering into the body of Christ (the Church).
7. In John’s baptism, no provisions were made for Gentiles.

The apostle Paul underlined some of these deficiencies in John’s baptism by saying, “*John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus*” (Acts 19:4).

When the men heard this, they were baptized into the name (eis to onoma) of the Lord Jesus. Note that John’s

baptism had not put these men “into the name of” (eis to onoma) of the Lord Jesus.

After they were baptized, Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

This story illustrates that if a person discovers that his baptism is faulty, it is not wrong for him or her to be re-baptized. Yet someone might counter by saying, “The apostle Paul said there is only ‘*one baptism*’ (Ephesians 4:5); how can a person be baptized twice?” Truly there is only “one baptism” for Christians, but John’s baptism is not it. John’s baptism was not appropriate after Jesus had died and ascended to heaven.

Acts 22:16

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

As Saul of Tarsus was travelling to Damascus to persecute Christians he suddenly saw the Lord Jesus. As a result of the encounter, Saul lost his eyesight and was led by the hand into Damascus.

A few days later, a devout man named Ananias came to Saul and told him that God had chosen him (Saul) to see the “*Just One*” (Jesus) and to hear Him (Jesus), so that he (Saul) could become a witness to what he had seen and heard. Then Ananias said, “*Now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins,*” having called on the name of the Lord.

Before Ananias had come, Saul had been praying (Acts 9:11). It is interesting to note that Ananias told Saul

to “*arise*” (anastas) from his praying. Therefore, it is clear that Saul did not get rid of his sins by praying. Rather, the time had come for action. Ananias said to Saul, “*Be baptized and wash away your sins.*” The words “*be baptized*” (baptisai) and “*wash away*” (apolousai) are in the imperative mode (command form), which means that Ananias commanded Saul to do this.

Ananias spoke first of baptism and then of washing. This shows that the two are connected. Had Ananias spoken first of washing then of baptism, one might think that a person could wash his sins away in some mystical and symbolical way prior to his being baptized. By putting baptism first Paul linked the two together. Baptism and washing both take place at the same time and in the same act.

Notice that the verbs “baptisai” and “apolousai” are in the middle voice, which indicates that the subject of the verb (Saul) would be acting upon himself, or in his own behalf. This means that Saul should initiate the baptizing (and the washing that was included).

To take the “washing” out of baptism, as many modern theologians do, robs baptism of much of its meaning. Of course, everyone understands that water does not take away a person’s sins. Only the blood Jesus can take away sins. In baptism, however, a person comes into contact with the death of Christ, in which Christ shed His blood.

I would like to point out that the participle (epikalesamenos), which is translated “*calling on*” the name of the Lord, is in the aorist tense. A participle in the aorist tense indicates that the action of the participle is

thought of as having taken place prior to the action described by the main verb. I would translate the Anninias' command as, "Arise and be baptized, having called (epikalesamenos) on His name." Remember that Saul had been calling on the name of the Lord for three days (Acts 9:9), yet his prayers had not washed away his sins. The Lord, however, answered His prayers by sending Ananias to tell him what to do. The time for praying was over and the time for baptism had come.

Romans 6:1-14

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace."

Jews that did not believe in Jesus could not accept the fact that Gentiles could become children of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. They feared that if such a thing were possible, it would circumvent the Law of Moses and morality would be undermined.

Paul, however, denied that Christians lived immoral lives. He asked, "*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it*" (Romans 6:2)? As proof that Christians had

died to sin, Paul referred to their baptism. He said, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death*” (Romans 6:3)?

People of today, who come to the Scriptures from the distance of almost two thousand years, as we do, have their minds filled with several hundred years of Protestant rhetoric. Paul’s mind was not so filled. For him, baptism was a fundamental Christian experience. In it, a person gets into Christ. Paul said, “*ebaptisthe men eis Christon Iesoun*” (We have been baptized into Christ Jesus).

Such an assertion sounds strange to anyone that has repeatedly heard, as we have, that a person gets into Christ by faith alone. For the apostle Paul, however, a person gets into Christ by being “*baptized into*” him. This was the way he (Paul) had gotten into Christ, for he wrote, “*As many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:3). Please notice that Paul did not consider that he had gotten into Christ by having experienced Him on the road to Damascus.

Paul thought of baptism as being a death. He also thought of it as being a burial. He said, “*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death*” (*eis ton thanaton*) (Romans 6:4).

Paul thought of baptism as the means by which a person gets into Christ’s death. Death, however, is not the end. The purpose of being buried with Christ through baptism into death is that we might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Notice that Jesus’ resurrection lay on the far side of His dying. In the same way, our being raised to a new life in Christ lies on the far side of our dying with Him in baptism. Not only does spiritual life on earth lie on the

far side of baptism, but also life with him in the hereafter lies on the far side of baptism. Paul said, “*For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be (esometha) in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:5). The word “esometha” (*we shall be*) is in the future tense. This implies that a person’s being baptized has something to do with that person’s ultimate future. See Romans 6:8-11.

The apostle Paul elaborated upon the reality of a person’s having been freed from sin by dying with Christ in baptism. He said, “*Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin*” (Romans 6:6-7).

The apostle Paul admonished, “*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace*” (Romans 6:12-14).

Now, let us sum up what is implied in Romans 6:1-14. Look, first, at the condition a person is in BEFORE he or she is baptized:

Verse 2. He or she is still living in sin

Verse 3. He or she is outside of Christ.

He or she is outside of Christ’s death.

Verse 4. He or she has not been buried with Christ.

Verse 5. He or she has not been united with Christ.

Verse 6. The old man has not been crucified.
The sinful body has not been done away with.

He or she is still a slave to sin.

Verse 7. He or she has not been freed from (acquitted of) sin.

Verse 8. He or she has not died with Christ.

Look also at what happens to a person IN baptism:

Verse 2. He or she dies to sin.

Verse 3. He or she gets into Christ's death.
He or she gets into Christ.

Verse 4. He or she is buried with Christ into death.

Verse 5. He or she is united with Christ in the likeness of His death.

Verse 6. The old man is crucified with Christ.
The body of sin is done away with.
He or she ceases being a slave to sin.

Verse 7-8. He or she dies with Christ
He or she is freed from (acquitted of) sin.

Now look at the blessings a person enjoys AFTER being baptized:

Verse 1. He or she does not continue in sin.

Verse 2. He or she does not live in sin.

Verse 3. He or she has come into Christ Jesus.

Verse 4. He or she walks in newness of life.

Verse 5. He or she will be raised with Christ.

Verse 6. He or she is no longer a slave of sin.

Verse 7. He or she has been freed from
(acquitted of) sin.

Verse 8. He or she will live with Christ.

Verse 10. He or she is alive to God.

Verse 11. He or she is dead to sin.

Verse 13. He or she is alive from the dead.

Verse 14. He or she is no longer under the reign
of sin.

He or she is not under the Law of
Moses.

He or she is under grace.

Now, the question arises, “Is baptism symbolism or reality?” To put the question another way, “Does a person really die to sin when he or she is (properly) baptized, or is baptism merely a symbol of that death?” Similarly, “Is a person really raised to a new life when he or she comes out of the water of baptism?”

There is, of course, a symbolic aspect to baptism; but is it **ONLY** symbolism? That is the question. A person can sometimes answer a question best by asking another question. One might ask, “Does a person really get into Christ when he is scripturally baptized?” Well, the apostle Paul thought so. He said, “*as many of us as were BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS were baptized into His death*” (Romans 6:3). Paul spoke as though a person really does get into Christ when he or she is baptized.

Another question: “Is it only symbolism that our ‘*old man*’ dies in baptism?” No, the “old man” is really crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6) when a person is “*baptized into His (Christ’s) death*” (Romans 6:3).

Question: “Is it only symbolical that a person can be UNITED with Christ?” No, the apostle Paul said, “*For if we have been UNITED together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:5).

Question: “Are Christians awaiting only a symbolical resurrection?” Paul said that resurrection of Christians would be “*in the likeness of His resurrection*” (Romans 6:5). “Was Christ’s resurrection only symbolical?” No, we believe that it was real.

Question: “Should a Christian consider himself dead only in a symbolical way to sin, or should he really stop sinning?” Obviously, he should stop sinning. Paul said, “*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin*” (Romans 6:11).

Question: “Is it only symbolism that a person is ‘*freed from sin*’ in baptism?” The apostle Paul did not think so. He said, “*He who has died has been freed from sin*” (Romans 6:7). The Greek verb translated here as “*freed*” (*dedikaiotai*) is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense means that the condition it describes is a *fiat accompli*. Other translations for “*dedikaiotai*” might be “cleared” or “acquitted,” meaning that a person will not be punished for what he did and that he is free to go.

More questions: “Is a person’s status really changed during baptism? Can it happen so quickly?” Well, how long does it take for God to forgive sins? Can He not do it

instantaneously, if He desires? Is His mind not quicker than the fastest computer?

Some more questions: “Is the physical act of baptism really necessary? Would it not be just as satisfactory if a person were to consider himself to be dead?” No. In response to these last questions, one might ask, “Would it have been satisfactory if Jesus had died only symbolically? Why was it necessary for Him actually to go to the cross?”

So we conclude, that, that if Jews that are baptized into Christ do not really die with Christ, they are still alive to the Law of Moses and, therefore, under obligated to keep it (Romans 6:14).

Similarly, if both Jews and Gentiles that are baptized into Christ’s death do not really die, they are still in their sins and not under grace (Romans 6:14). In which case, their professed faith will not help them.

(I am indebted to Tom Black, one of my sons-in-law, for the above information about Romans 6:1-14. Tom has prepared some excellent charts that show the points mentioned above.)

1 Corinthians 1:11-17

“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

The apostle Paul heard from someone in Cloe’s household that the church in Corinth was not united. The

Corinthian Christians were saying, “*I am of Paul;*” “*I am of Apollos;*” “*I am of Cephas;*” or “*I am of Christ.*”

This grieved Paul. He asked, “*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name (eis to onoma) of Paul?*” The expression “eis to onoma” means literally “into the name?” Paul asked, rhetorically, whether or not any of them had been baptized into his (Paul’s) name. If any of them had been baptized into Paul’s name, they would have been “Paulites.” Paul was glad that he had not baptized many of the brethren in Corinth with his own hands, lest any of them think he had baptized them into his own name.

From this, it appears that being baptized “into the name” of a person results in belonging to that person in a special way. If this is correct, it has tremendous implications for the understanding of baptism. It means that a person that is baptized “into the name of Christ” belongs to Christ in a special way. Put succinctly, he is a “Christian.” This sheds light on the way people became Christians in New Testament times. It shows that baptism was a part of the process of becoming a “Christian.”

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.”

This is a sermonette that the apostle Paul wrote and sent to the Christians in Corinth. The thrust of his sermonette is that, after God had saved the children of

Israel from Egypt, their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. This is a warning to Christians not to assume that they will be spared if they commit such sins as the children of Israel did.

Also the experience of the children of Israel in crossing the Red Sea sheds light on baptism. In that crossing, they were all “*baptized into Moses*” (eis ton Mouseen ebaptistheesan). Their baptism seems to have committed them to Moses and to all that Moses stood for. If that is true, it implies that being baptized “*into Christ*” commits a person to Christ and to all that He stands for.

In this connection, it is interesting that the children of Israel were not on their way to the Promised Land until after they had been “*baptized into Moses*” by passing under the cloud and through the sea.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”

Many people think that a discussion of baptism is divisive, but such a discussion need not be divisive. Baptism can and should be a unifying experience. Paul said, “*We were all baptized into one body*” (eis hen soma ebaptistheemen). His statement shows that there is but “*one body*” and that everyone in it has been put there by baptism.

The “*one body*” to which Paul referred is, of course, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Paul and the Corinthians

had gotten into the church by being “*baptized into*” it. As a result, they had all been “*made to drink into one Spirit.*”

Some people would not allow the word “*baptized*” in this passage to refer to a baptism in water. They say, “Paul was speaking about a Holy Spirit baptism.” The resolution of this question depends on how one understands the expression, “*For by one Spirit*” (en heni pneumati).

In order to look for possible translations of the preposition “en” when it is used, as here, with the dative case, I turned to the Greek-English dictionary in the back of the Greek text that is published by the United Bible Societies. I found twelve different translations for “en” when it is used with the dative case. They are: “*In, on, at, near, by, before, among, within, with, into, to, for.*” Not all of these words would make sense in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The ones that make the most sense are “*in,*” “*by,*” “*with,*” or “*into.*” Which one is right? Grammatically, all four are satisfactory. The translation that one chooses will likely depend on one’s overall view of what the Holy Spirit does in conversion. If a person feels that no one can come to Christ unless the Holy Spirit opens his heart, he will want to use the expression “*in one Spirit*” or “*with one Spirit*” or “*into one Spirit.*” These expressions would mean that Paul was not thinking of water baptism at all, but of an immersion “*in,*” “*with,*” or “*into*” the Spirit of God. This interpretation, however, presents certain difficulties. It implies that a person cannot believe, repent, or be (effectually) baptized, unless he or she has first received the Holy Spirit. The basic difficulty with such a theory is that it places on God the onus of everyone’s being damned, to whom He does not send the Holy Spirit. In view of the

unacceptability of such a theory, it does not seem likely that Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that they had all received a baptism of the Holy Spirit and that this baptism had put them into the “*one body*” (the church).

There is no evidence that any of the Corinthians had received a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Remember that, although the Twelve Apostles had experienced a Holy Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost, it had not put them into the “*one body*.” I say this for they were already in the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20) at the time they were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Further, not even Saul’s exhilarating experience on the road to Damascus put him into the “*one body*,” for he still had to be baptized in water to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Nor did the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Cornelius (and his relatives and friends) experienced put them into the “*one body*,” for they still had to go into water and be baptized (Acts 10:47).

Therefore, it does not seem likely that the apostle Paul was telling the Corinthians that he (and they) had been baptized “in,” “with,” or “into” one Spirit. What seems more likely is that he was reminding them that they all had been baptized “*by one Spirit*,” meaning that they had been led “*by one Spirit*” to baptism. If the verse is taken in this way, baptism becomes a unifying factor, since it was an experience they had had in common.

Galatians 3:25-27

“But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

The apostle Paul was very concerned about his friends and brethren in Galatia, Asia Minor. He was concerned lest they fall away from the faith. Certain Jewish brethren had come to Galatia from Judea and were trying to persuade the Gentile Christians to accept the Law of Moses and thus to be integrated into the Jewish religion. They were telling them that circumcision was important. They were also telling them that they should keep the Sabbath and other holy days of the Jews.

In response to this, the apostle Paul wrote the Christians in Galatia that it was not necessary for them to be circumcised. He said that they had already become children of Abraham and “*sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26).

Some people interpret Paul’s phrase “*through faith in Christ Jesus*” to mean that the Gentiles had become sons of God exclusively by believing that God had saved them for Christ’s sake. What Paul said, however, was that the Galatians had become sons of God through “the faith” (dia tees pisteos). “The faith” is a “package concept.” (I am indebted to my friend Royce Frederick for the idea of a “package concept.”) The expression “the faith” encompasses the whole plan of salvation. It even includes baptism, as the next verse shows.

The apostle Paul went on to say, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). Paul’s view was that by being “*baptized*” (ebaptistheete), the Galatians had “*put on Christ*” (Christon enedusasthe). It was similar to the way people put on clothing.

Who was it that Paul thought of as having “*put on Christ?*” Was it not those that had been “*baptized into Christ?*” Note the expression, “*as many of you as.*” This means that everyone that had been baptized had put on Christ. Had some of those that were not baptized put on Christ? If they had, there is no mention made of it in the New Testament.

As regards physical clothing, people can be clothed, unclothed, or half-clothed. With Christ, however, people cannot be half clothed. They are either clothed or unclothed. Those who have been “*baptized into Christ*” have, according to Paul, “*put on Christ.*” Therefore, they are clothed with Him. It should be obvious, then, that anyone that refuses to put on Christ in baptism has not been clothed with Him.

Many theologians today do not look at baptism as the apostle Paul did. They do not always prescribe baptism for people that come to them desiring to get into Christ. They say something like, “Accept Jesus as your personal savior.” The Galatians, however, had gained entrance into Christ by being “*baptized into Christ*” (eis Christon ebaptistheete). The Greek preposition “eis,” when it is used with the accusative case, shows direction “toward” or “entrance into” something. Thus, when the Galatians were baptized, God put them into Christ.

Ephesians 4:3-6

“...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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.”

The apostle Paul was concerned about the church in Ephesus. He wanted the members of the church to keep “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). He reminded the brethren that there was but “*one body*” and “*one Spirit*.” He also reminded them that there is “*one hope*” to which they were all called (Ephesians 4:4). He added that there is but “*one Lord*” and “*one faith*” (Ephesians 4:5).

All these factors form a powerful argument for unity in the church. After enumerating the above factors, Paul added another, which may surprise some people. He said that there is but “*one baptism*” (hen baptisma) (Ephesians 4:5).

How could Paul have said there is but one baptism? There were many baptisms in Paul’s day: The Jews had various kinds of baptisms, John the Baptist had a baptism, and some of the pagan Greeks had a kind of baptism. It almost takes one’s breath away to read that there is but “*one baptism*.”

A part of the explanation for how baptism unifies a congregation may lie in the fact that baptism is like a birth. Just as a physical birth cements relationships within a human family, so a spiritual birth cements relationships within the church family. Those who have been born into the church family have a kinship with the other members of the family. It is a kinship that outsiders do not have with the members of the family. Hence, baptism draws a demarcation line between those that are in the family and those that are out of it. Baptism puts people into the family, where they can experience the unity that is in Christ.

Colossian 2:9-14

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

The apostle Paul warned the Colossian Christians not to allow anyone to deceive them into thinking that they were at a disadvantage because they had not received physical circumcision. Paul assured them that they had received a kind of circumcision. They had received “*the circumcision of Christ*.”

The “*circumcision of Christ*” is more complete than Jewish circumcision. It gets rid of “*the whole body of the sins of the flesh*,” not just the foreskin. This getting rid of “*the sins of the flesh*” takes place when a person is “*buried*” with Christ “*in baptism*” (Colossians 2:12). The Greek word “*suntaphentes*” (buried) is an aorist passive participle. The action that it describes antedates the action of the verb that it goes with, which in this case is “*perietmeetheete*” (you were circumcised). This makes it clear that the Colossians had to be “*buried*” with Christ in baptism before they could receive the “*circumcision of Christ*.”

Circumcision has from olden times been a sign of belonging to the people of God. It follows, then, that the Colossians did not belong to the people of God until after they had been circumcised with the “*circumcision of Christ*” in baptism.

This “*putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh*” is not, however, all that happens in baptism. A person is also raised with Christ in it. The New King James Version makes this clear. It says regarding baptism, “*in which you also were raised*” (Colossians 2:12). The Greek expression “*en ho*” (in which) refers back to “*baptismo*” (baptism), its nearest antecedent. Some of the versions, notably the New International Version, muddle the thought that “*en ho*” refers back to baptism.

So, both the “*putting off the body of the sins of the flesh*” and the being “*raised with Him*” take place in baptism. These take place through faith, because without faith baptism is of no use. It is due to “*faith in the working of God,*” who raised Jesus from the dead, that a person is raised to a new life in baptism.

1 Peter 3:18-21

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

In the days of Noah Christ went and preached to the spirits, which are now in prison (1 Peter 3:19). How did Christ preach to them? Presumably, He preached through Noah, but the people of Noah’s day were, regrettably, not obedient to his preaching. The only ones that responded to Noah’s warnings were members of his own family.

As God commanded, Noah built an ark, and he and his family were saved in it. They were, so to speak, “*saved*

through water.” The same water that brought destruction to others brought salvation to them.

The apostle Peter said that what happened to Noah and his family is similar to what happens to us in baptism. He called baptism “*an antitype which now saves us*” (1 Peter 3:21). This language disturbs people who deny that baptism has any part in our salvation. Baptism does not, of course, save anyone by itself. It is God who saves. God is the one who saved Noah and his family, and He is the one who saves Christians. However, just as God saved the eight souls in Noah’s family through water, so He also saves people through baptism, according to 1 Peter 3:21.

The apostle Peter emphasized that the essence of baptism is not in the removal of the “*filth of the flesh.*” Baptism is not a washing the body to get rid of dirt. Rather, it is an inquiry about “*a good conscience toward God*” (1 Peter 3:21). I use the word “inquiry” advisedly, because it is a better translation of the Greek word “*eperoteema*,” than “*answer*,” which many versions of the New Testament have. “*Answer*” implies that a person gets baptized as a response to his or her having already received a good conscience. “*Inquiry*,” on the other hand, shows that a person is searching for a good conscience by being baptized.

The Greek noun “*eperoteema*” is used in only this one place in the New Testament. The verb form of the word (*eperotao*), however, is used ten times. Each time that the word “*eperotao*” is used, it means to ask a question, as when Jesus said, “*I will also ask (eperoteeso) you one question*” (Mark 11:29).

So a person should not get baptized because he thinks he has found the answer to his sin problem. Rather, he should get baptized because he is searching for the answer.

CONCLUSION

A scriptural view of baptism is helpful in many ways. It helps explain some passages that would otherwise be difficult to understand. It helps a person understand what Jesus meant when He said to Nicodemus, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5).

A scriptural view of baptism also helps a person understand what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote to Titus, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”* (Titus 3:5).

In addition to helping unravel some difficult passages, a clear view of baptism, saves a person from a number of disastrous theological views. For example, a person with a proper understanding of baptism will know that faith must be carried along to its fulfillment in obedience in order for it to be viable. Such a person will also know that faith is not merely a matter of mental assent or an emotional attachment.

No one that understands baptism will think that God arbitrarily decides which individuals will be saved and which will not. He will know that God leaves it up to individuals whether or not they wish to obey the gospel and thus be saved.

A person with a proper view of baptism will recognize the importance of preaching the gospel so that people can hear it, believe it, and obey it. Such a person will not think that emotional gimmicks can spread the kingdom of God.

No one that sees baptism clearly will suppose that the only thing for a person to do when he or she hears the gospel's call is to pray and wait for God to send the Holy Spirit. Such a person will understand that he or she should arise and be baptized to wash away sins, just as Saul of Tarsus did.

People who have a firm grasp of the place of baptism in the New Testament will have a clearer view of the church. They will understand that the church is a spiritual body and that people get into it by the spiritual birth that takes place in baptism. They will understand that the church is not a manmade denomination that people can join if they choose. Also, no one that understands baptism will start baptizing babies for sins they have not committed.

Many other examples could be cited of how a clear view of baptism aids in understanding Christian doctrine. When baptism is allowed to play the role in the religious life of people that it does in the New Testament, many theological errors are avoided. If a congregation wants to be scriptural, and thus truly spiritual, it will examine baptism just as an archaeologist examines bones that he finds in the ground to see whether or not they reveal some truth regarding the past.