

Baptisms

History

The first use of the Greek word for ‘baptize’ appears to be by Euripides in the 5th century BC. The word is used in reference to a sinking ship. This is followed in the 4th century BC by Xenophone who used the word when illustrating the dipping of swords in blood before battle. In both cases, the word is used in a way as to indicate ‘saturation’ and, in the latter case, also as a means of ceremonial identification.

The practice of ‘saturating’ an object as a means of illustrating identification was not unknown among the Jews. It is used frequently in the Old Testament (OT) [Ex.24:8; 29:4,7,16,21; 30: 19-21; 37:29; Lev.1:5; 3:2,8,13; 4:6,7,17,18; 5:9; Lev.6:27; 7:1,14; 8:10-12,19,24,30; 9:18; 14:7,16-18,26-29,51; 16:14,15,19 Num.8:6,7; 19:13; Job 2:12; Pro.1:23; Isa.32:15; 44:3; 52:15; Jer.7:20; 42:18; Ez.36: 25; Joel 2:28,29 (cp. Acts 2:17,18); Mal.3:10; etc.].

Even a ceremonial type of baptism (as we know it today) was practiced in the Jewish culture long before John the Baptist’s Proselytes to Judaism were trained in the Law’s requirements, circumcised and put on probation. If they successfully completed the period of probation, then they were publicly accepted as Jews by water baptism.

The Essenes, Hellenists, Egyptians, Eleusins, Mithrites and a variety of other cultures and cults also practiced it.

Greek Words for Baptism

It should be noted that the English word ‘baptism’ is not a translation of any Greek word. Rather, it is a ‘transliteration’ (meaning that the English word is borrowed directly from the source language).

Four different Greek words are translated in scripture as ‘baptism’. These words are listed here along with their KJV translations and examples:

- βάπτω (BAP-to)
To dip (one’s finger, bread or vesture) [Lu.16:24; Jn.13:26; Rev.19:13].
- βάπτίζω (Bap-TID-zo)
To baptize, clean (hands), wash (hands) [Ma.3:11; Mk.1:4,8; 7:4a; 16:16; Lu.11:38; Acts 1:5; 1Cor.1: 7; 10:2].
- βάπτισμα (BAP-tis-mah)
Baptism [Lu.3:3; Eph.4:5; Col.2: 12; 1Pet.3:21].
- βάπτισμός (BAP-tis-mos)
Baptism, washing (incl. tables) [Mk.7:4b,8; Heb. 6:2; 9:10].

As one can readily see by studying the references, the use of the words span routine cleaning actions to ceremonial illustrations. The following pages will be spent on an ex-

amination of the various applications for these words as found in scripture.

Baptism of Moses

[1Cor.10:1-4]

Nation of Israel identified with Moses during the exploits of the exodus from Egypt. God began by treating the nation of Israel like He treated faithful Moses. What was due to Moses (because of his faith) was also extended to the nation of Israel. It should be noted that this relationship did not occur *because* of the cloud and the sea, etc., but that these were manifestations of a relationship that already existed [Ex.3,4].

Baptism of the cup/cross

[Ma.20:22; 26:39; Jn.18:11]

Christ's drinking from the 'cup' refers to the agony of His sacrificial death on the cross. Symbolically, a full 'cup', or 'measure', refers to circumstances that are ripe for judgment by God [2Sam.8:2; Jer.51:13; Hab.3:6; Ma.7:2; 23: 32]. In this case, it was the judgment of our sin. As in the Baptism of Moses the illustration, in of itself, means nothing. It is merely the illustration of a spiritual truth.

Baptism of John

[Ma.3:6; 21:25; Mk.1:4; 11:29; Lu.3; 20:4; Jn.1:25,28,31,33a; etc.]

Recall that from a historical standpoint the Jews were already familiar with water baptism as a means of initiation for proselytes. This was *not* a commandment from God. When a non-Jew wanted to follow the Jewish religion God required only that he/she voluntarily submit to the same covenant the Jews observed [Ex.12:48; Lev. 19:34; 24:22; Num.9:14; 15:13-16]. Thus, water baptism, for the Jew, was a tradition only and had no scriptural basis requiring or recommending it.

The purpose of John the Baptist's ministry was *not* water baptism, but repentance [Isa.40:3]. John specifically denied that the water performed any spiritual function [Jn.3:28], but he did testify that God had told him to use the water [Jn.1:33]. From this we can conclude that, while the water performed no spiritual cleansing, it was still God's plan for John to use the water not only for its advertising significance, but for a far more important role soon to be revealed.

Repentance results in salvation, no matter what dispensation is in view. The fact that John did baptize those who had repented was to illustrate, using their own tradition, what had taken place.

John was baptizing into the Jewish faith people that had been proselytes, or, born and raised as Jews. This was very effective at driving home the point that fellowship with God was gained through a change of mind (repentance) and not dutiful attendance (in mind, or body) to the requirements of the Law. It showed that attendance to the law was supposed to be a *manifestation* of one's existing relationship with God done out of a bond

of love, not the means of *establishing*, or *maintaining* the relationship.

It was so effective, in fact, that when word reached the religious leadership in Jerusalem that John was baptizing Jews they did not understand why and sent representatives to investigate [Jn.1:19-25].

It is particularly interesting to note that when the priests and Levites saw him baptizing people they asked whether he was the fulfillment of OT prophecy [cp. Isa.52:13-15; Ez.36:24-27]. This would indicate that John usually walked people down into the water, scooping water up and sprinkling (or pouring) it on them, rather than dunking them (since this was more in line with their expectations from their religious history and tradition [cp. Heb.9:10,13,19,21]). This may not have been an exclusive pattern (see next item).

Jesus' Baptism

[Ex.28:1-3; 29:4-9; Lev.8:1-6,12; Num.4:2,3,43,47; 8:5-7,14-26; Ma.3:13-17; Lu.3:21-23; Jn.1:29-34; Heb.5:1-10 (oil is a scriptural symbol of the Holy Spirit (HS).)]

When Jesus comes to John the Baptist and the observation is made that Jesus had no sin to repent of, Jesus asks John to baptize him anyway in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus is fulfilling the law concerning the ordination of the Levitical priesthood.

- Jesus met the requirement of apprenticeship by astounding the temple priests when he was 12 years old.
- He had now turned 30 years old meeting the second requirement.
- The only remaining requirement was to be anointed into the office. Exodus tells us that the high priest was first washed, and then anointed. In the same way, Christ was first washed (dunked?) by John, and then anointed, by God, with the HS (rather than with symbolic oil).

Into one God-man are the priesthood roles combined:

- The position of the Aaronic priesthood (anointed before the sacrifice and the only one to have oil [representing the Holy Spirit] poured on his head [Jn.3:34; Heb.1:9])
- The service of the Levitical priesthood (Christ's role as intermediary for our sins and expounder of God's Word)
- The Melchisedec priesthood (signifying His kingdom authority).

It is clear that the purpose of Jesus' baptism was to set His 'public' ministry into motion. For this reason we do *not* “follow the Lord in baptism” any more than we would contribute to our own salvation, sanctification, healing, or Lordship.

Water Baptism

[Jn.3:22 w/ 4:1,2 & Jn.20:21; Acts 8:12-16,38; 10:47,48; 16:15, 33; 19:3b,4; 1Pet.3:21]

As we saw earlier, John the Baptist's performance of water baptism was not of any

theological significance to anyone other than Christ. He took (by God's direction) advantage of an existing tradition and used it to draw attention to his message of repentance for salvation.

After Jesus' public appointment to the office of the Levitical priesthood, we see His disciples also performing water baptisms on new converts.

Two things are significant. The first is that the new converts were Jews, thus the water baptism held, for them, the same significance (as an illustration) as when performed by John the Baptist—a dramatic distinction between what was taught by most Scribes and Pharisees and what was taught by Christ.

The second point of interest is that Christ did not baptize anyone. This is because the *command* to baptize was given only to John the Baptist; it was not a part of Christ's ministry. Christ did not perform water baptisms because it was not needed to establish, or maintain the believer's relationship to God. He also did not prevent His disciples from baptizing because there was no godly reason to deny this form of worship. This was also true of the Ethiopian eunuch (who was a Jewish proselyte [Acts 8:27]). It was simply a form of worship with a distinct function in the Jewish culture.

Incidences of Water Baptism

[Acts 10:47; 11:17]

The first Gentile converts of the spreading ministry are of Cornelius' household. Acts 10:47 and 11:17 are frequently used by well meaning believers to espouse the 'need' for water baptism. Quite the opposite is true. It is important to note that Peter does *not* ask if there is any reason why they *must* water baptize them. Instead, he asks if there is any reason why they *cannot* be baptized. This is because water baptism was not a commandment, but Peter felt that since God had shown that there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile that he should not show any distinctions either. Since the disciples had been baptizing some Jewish believers, then Peter felt that it was also important to offer water baptism to the new Gentile converts to show that they also recognized that the Gentile believers were no different than the Jewish believers. In effect, Peter is saying,

“Since God has shown no distinction, then can anyone think of a reason why we should make a distinction in water baptism?”

To not do so would be to imply that a 'religious' distinction still exists.

Peter then commands that when they are water baptized that it be done “in the name of the Lord.” The word “in” is the Greek “ἐν” and is a primary preposition meaning the same as the English “in.” The phrase means “by the authority of.” This new addition to the tradition is added specifically for the Gentile converts so that will not confuse the baptism with the Jewish proselyte baptism, or, the baptisms being performed by numerous other cults and pagan religions. Notice that the command is not to *be* water baptized (it was still a voluntary form of worship), but to describe *how* it is to be done (*if* it is done).

Peter does not perform the water baptism. It is reasonable to assume (although not certain) that if Peter had commanded them to be water baptized, then he would have offered

the service himself. He was certainly in the right place at the right time (in fact, for some time).

[Acts 16:15]

Since Christ had not commanded water baptism, then Lydia was not showing her faithfulness through her water baptism. Her faithfulness to the Lord was shown in her acceptance of the Gospel (vs.14). We can see that the tradition has carried over into Gentile Christian experience as a routine event. It is still a form of worship signifying a cleansing, but without the Jewish culture's focus on the legalism.

[Acts 16:33]

It is important to note that Paul did not perform the baptism. Historically, Paul baptized no one we know of (see doctrinal baptism). Peter had already shown that there was no distinction between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. It wasn't necessary for Paul to belabor the point. He did not deny the practice, but he did not emphasize it either. Rather, he recognized that emphasizing the tradition would, over time, tend to authorize it as having more significance than it should. His position seems to be that;

- It is not part of the plan of salvation,
- He didn't consider water baptism part of his God given commission [1Cor.1:17; see Doctrinal Baptism below], and,
- 'Public' baptism (like Jewish proselyte baptisms) could easily degenerate from a form of private or public worship to a 'sign' that one was converted. Legalists would seek after this 'sign' [1Cor.1:22] in the same way the Jews did with the proselytes.

[1Peter 3:21; cp. Gen.6:8; 7:23; Heb.11:7]

The eight souls were saved by the ark from the water, *but were saved by the water from the world's influence*. We are saved by faith from an eternal Hell, but we are saved by water baptism from the influence of the world. How is this done? It is not that water baptism somehow eradicates our sin nature. It does not. In fact, it has nothing to do with the mechanics of the water baptism at all. Rather, it is the attitude of that person that desires water baptism that protects them from the influence of the world. That attitude is referred to as a "good conscience toward God" or being "in-fellowship." It is the believer's practical (vs. positional) relationship with Christ that protects them from the world's influence.

Method of Water Baptism

There has been some debate over the 'proper' method to water baptize. Some will say that you must baptize "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost" (and that it must be by dunking, sprinkling or pouring). This is based on a misinterpretation of the Great Commission [see Doctrinal Baptism]. When water baptisms were performed they were

done “in the name of the Lord” (or similar) where the primary preposition “in” was the Greek “ἐν” (rather than “εἰς”, but more on this later).

However, this is to miss the point. There is no ‘proper’ way to water baptize. Because it is a tradition and not a commandment, then the method that should be used (*if* it is used) should be a balance between that which;

- (1) Detracts least from its function of worship.
- (2) Is expeditious.
- (3) Is culturally most compatible.

In summary, it may be said that water baptism is a means of worship. It is not required either for salvation, or for discipleship. As a traditional form of worship, it stood then and stands now in very real danger of becoming a ‘sign’ of salvation (and has already done so in many denominations).

“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”
[Gal.3:3]

Doctrinal Baptism

[Ma.28:19; Acts 19:5; Rom.6:3; 1Cor.1:10-31; Gal.3:27]

The word ‘baptize’ means to saturate. Many have mistakenly limited its use in scripture. It is assumed by many that all references that are not classified by the verse must refer to either water baptism or Spirit baptism. This is simply not the case.

[Ma.28:19]

The Great Commission is directed to the ‘disciples’ rather than to the ‘apostles’. This lends credibility to its application to disciples today. What does it instruct us to do? It says that the disciples (“ye”) are to;

“go...and TEACH all nations” [Emphasis mine]

Then, without the use of a preposition the verse continues. This indicates no break in the train of thought.

“[B]aptizing them” [saturating those people] *in the* [Greek “εἰς” meaning ‘with respect to’, ‘concerning the’] *name* [Greek “ὄνομα” (onoma) meaning ‘authority’, ‘character’] *of the Father, and of the* [still no particle added in the Greek] *Son, and of the Holy Ghost,* [to separate this thought from the previous one] *teaching them to observe* [Greek ‘τερεω’ (tereo) meaning ‘to preserve by carefully watching’] *all things whatsoever I have* [past tense] *commanded....”* [Christ never commanded water baptism during His earthly ministry.]

The Great Commission, therefore, is a commandment to spread God’s Word! It is a commandment to tell everyone of the roles of: God the Father (His character and love for each of us, etc.), Jesus Christ (manifested in flesh to provide a bridge back to), and the Holy Spirit (the revealing and empowering character of God, etc.). It is most certainly *not* a commandment to water baptize believers.

[Acts 19:5]

The particle “in” (“in the name of”) is not the same particle used by Peter in his instruction for baptizing the family of Cornelius. Peter uses the preposition ‘en’ (denoting fixed position). In this case (and the one above), the preposition is ‘εις’ (meaning ‘the point reached or entered’, ‘with respect to’, ‘concerning’). This verse could be paraphrased and amplified as,

“Upon hearing this, they were then fully instructed concerning the role of the Lord Jesus.”

[Rom.6:3,4] It is important to remember the strict meanings of the words ‘baptize’ (saturated) and ‘into’/’εις’ (concerning). The text is expounded below:

Know ye not [Don’t you know] that so many of us as were [that if (and I know) you were] baptized into Jesus Christ [were previously saturated with doctrine concerning Jesus Christ] were baptized [you were taught] into his death? [concerning his death?]. Therefore we are buried [our past is buried] with him by baptism into death [with Christ by this teaching concerning his death]: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father [raised from the dead for God’s glory], even so we also (as ambassadors for Christ) should walk in newness of life [live disciplined lives as new creatures in Christ].

Compare this admonition with 6:6-23.

[1Cor.1:10-31]

These verses also refer to doctrinal ‘saturation’. Verse 10 sets up the desired condition—that all of the believers in the church subscribe to the same doctrine.

The actual condition [1:11] was that there were arguments about doctrine. Specifically, there were personal opinions about the meaning of scriptures that some people within the church were espousing. They were hiding the fact they were personal opinions by ascribing the ideas to the apostles. Neither Christ nor the Apostles differed on doctrines. It was, nevertheless, convenient for these people to provide their ‘human wisdom’ [1:17] with the earmarks of authority.

The ‘wisdom’ they espoused was, apparently, [1:17] a gospel of works for salvation since it negated the cross of Christ. That same problem takes place today on a much grander scale. It is called ‘Lordship salvation.’

Included in these verses are some words we have seen before.

- Both 1:13 and 1:15 use the preposition ‘εις’ (in). From previous study, we have seen that this word might be translated today as ‘concerning’, or, ‘with respect to’.
- Earlier we saw that ‘name’ is a reference to the authority and/or character of the person spoken of.
- We have also seen that the word baptize [1:13-17] means to ‘saturate’.

Thus, the intent appears to read, “saturate concerning the character and/or authority of Christ.”

In light of the context of the verses and the idiom used, it is most likely that the word baptism here refers to doctrinal training. Concerning the disagreement, Paul says that they were not taught about the character and authority of Paul, but of Christ. He was glad that he had only disciplined Crispus, Gaius and the family of Stephen for concern over people believing he was teaching his own ‘version’ of Christ’s doctrine, thus claiming authority for himself. He was confident of his calling to preach the Gospel and in doing so avoid the doctrinal divisions that came after that.

Is Paul sticking his head in the sand and avoiding the real issue? No, he is attacking the issue head on. The root of the problem was fundamental—their understanding of salvation by God’s grace. As a local church they had already begun to degenerate into the Nicolaitan Error (class structure manifested as stratification into ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’). They had taken their eyes off God and His grace and focused, instead, on the trappings of human wisdom and signs. Today we experience the same error. We become absorbed in debates over baptismal methods (signs), textual criticism (human wisdom), valid Spiritual gifts (signs), a proliferation of rapture theories (human wisdom and signs), definition of predestination (human wisdom), etc.

Paul’s commission is not the Great Commission. The Great Commission includes doctrinal teaching. Paul’s commission [Acts 9:15] is evangelism. Perhaps the reason that Paul was not commissioned to teach doctrine was that he had the equivalent of a worldly Ph.D. in Biblical Studies. By ‘worldly,’ I mean that Paul had been taught all that the natural man could learn of scripture. As vast as that knowledge could be, it imparted very little real wisdom or understanding. For Paul to teach would have been inconsistent with God’s plan [1Cor. 1:26-31]. For God to receive the credit the system of teaching credentials would have to be turned upside down from what the world would expect. The authority to teach was based on the gift of the Holy Spirit and had nothing whatsoever to do with worldly credentials. If Paul had taught, it is very likely that he would spend most of his time discrediting his ‘Bible College’ education as the source of his authority. God’s plan, using the Holy Spirit, is to enable godly, common folk, through the Holy Spirit, to expound scripture to the masses. It is then quite clear (except to current day Pharisees) who deserves the glory when people are saved, or edified.

I realize that this reflects poorly on the practice of most denominations of requiring a seminary graduation before allowing the person to become a missionary, or pastor in a church. This is an example of the extent that worldly wisdom has permeated denominational thought.

Holy Spirit Baptism

[Ma.3:11; Mk.1:8; 16:16; Lu.3:16; Jn.1:33; Acts 1:5,8; 2:17,38, 41; 9:18; Rom.6:4; 1Cor.12:13; 15:29; Gal.3:27; Eph.4:5; Col.2:12; Tit.3:5]

This baptism results in the believer being permanently sealed (permanently saved) and given one or more gifts. This occurred after an Apostle, or specially empowered prophet, laid their hands on the believer (prior to Cornelius’ salvation around 41 AD), or at the

moment of salvation without the laying on of hands (after Cornelius).

[Mk.16:16]

It is important to note that the Great Commission identified in vs.15 is to “*preach the gospel*”, but says nothing about baptism. The result of preaching the Gospel is that people will hear it (“*faith cometh by hearing...the word of God*”). It says that non-believers will be damned (not believers who have not been water baptized). It says that only believers who are ‘baptized’ are saved.

- *If this is a reference to water baptism, then it would leave a gap between the period that you become a believer (thus not damned) and when you get water baptized (saved).*
- *If this referred to water baptism, then the time between believing the Gospel and becoming water baptized would be a ‘no-man’s-land’—you’re not lost, but you’re not saved either.*
- *If this was referring to water baptism, then the verse would describe a condition unknown elsewhere in scripture.*

Fortunately, this is not the case. There is no ‘limbo’ condition described in scripture.

This verse refers to the Holy Spirit baptism that occurs (today) immediately upon believing the Gospel message. The person who believes is not damned. Because they are immediately Spirit baptized, then there is no ‘limbo’ period before they are saved. They are saved the instant they believe the Gospel. At that instant they receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, receive one or more gifts, and are “*sealed until the day of redemption*” [Eph.4:30].

[Acts 1:5,8]

Before Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was imparted to people only temporarily. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given permanently. These verses refer to the events of the upper room during Pentecost [Acts 2].

[Acts 2:17]

A reference to Spiritual gifts.

[Acts 2:38]

Water ‘baptism’ does not remit sins. Remission of sins is gained by believing the Gospel [Ma.26:28; Acts 10:43]. “Repentance” is a word that means ‘change of mind’ (see ‘Repentance’). In this case, the person changes their mind from whatever they used to believe to now believing the Gospel [Acts 3:19]. Since ‘repentance’ is a reference to believing the Gospel and water baptism is not required as a prerequisite to receiving remission of sins, then this verse is not speaking of water baptism.

The word “in” (“*in the name of*”) is the Greek word ‘επι’ (epi) and implies the action of ‘superimposing.’ We have seen earlier that the use of the word “*name*” referred to ‘authority’ and/or ‘character’ of the person named. The word “*for*” (“*for the remission...*”) is the Greek word ‘εις’ which we are already familiar with as meaning ‘concerning,’ ‘referring to,’ etc. The verse could be amplified and paraphrased as,

“First change your mind concerning the Gospel message (repent). After that, everyone should be ‘Spirit’ baptized—an act that superimposes (imparts) on you the same authority that was used by Christ to remit sins. This ‘baptism’ is how you receive God’s gift to you—the Spirit (as Joel promised and you have observed among us).”

The result is that when they ‘repented’ (believed the Gospel) they were saved, but had not yet received the Spirit since this was a pre-Cornelius event. That would be taken care of by the laying on of hands. Today (post Cornelius), we are ‘baptized’ by the Holy Spirit immediately upon our belief in God’s plan of salvation. This means that the Holy Spirit is superimposed on us as we have superimposed ourselves on Christ’s payment. As we believe the Gospel, we are effectively throwing (superimposing) our trust on God’s ability to save us through the finished work of Christ. In response to that trust, God superimposes His Spirit on us permanently. It is in that response to our trust that God remits our sin, Spirit baptizes us, and bestows supernatural gifts to empower our ministry.

[Acts 2:41]

This refers to Holy Spirit baptism. Recall that before Cornelius’ conversion the Holy Spirit baptism required the laying on of hands. It is on this same day that about 3000 people received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands. The reason that it is not likely to refer to water baptism is:

- Peter’s explanation of the events does not refer to water baptism, but it refers to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit [2:17, 18,38,39].
- Peter never exhorts them to be water baptized.
- The early church attended to instruction, fellowship, prayer, and praise [2:41-47]. Water baptism is not mentioned.

[Acts 9:17,18]

“[A]nd was baptized” indicates Spirit baptism. He was Spirit baptized when Ananias laid his hands on him. It is then that Paul received his sight. Compare Acts 21:16, where it is clear that Paul listens to Ananias’ message, he is saved by ‘calling on’ (επικαλισομινος, epikalisominos = invoking) the ‘name’ (authority) of the Lord (salvation by belief—as he is later heard to express in Rom.1:16), and is Spirit baptized immediately by the laying on of Ananias’ hands.

[1Cor.12:13]

Recall that the ‘baptism’ of the Holy Spirit took place by the laying on of hands to

Jews before the conversion of Cornelius. After Cornelius, the laying on of hands was not required for newly believing Jews to receive the Holy Spirit baptism. The Gentiles never required the laying on of hands, but received the Holy Spirit baptism immediately upon believing the Gospel.

The use of the word “we” in this verse indicates that God’s Word is referring to the Gentile “brethren” of verse 1. This would show that all the Gentile believers have received the ‘baptism’ of the Holy Spirit, thus indicating that this particular baptism takes place at salvation.

[Gal.3:25-29]

This is the same doctrine that Paul is referring to in the last verse [1Cor.12:13]. We see in verse 26 that the subject is salvation and the relationship gained by salvation. That is clearly still the topic in verse 28, 29. The phrase, “*as many of you as*” means ‘if you.’

This raises a question. Paul could have meant one of two things by this.

- Of the believers spoken of, only selected ones had been “baptized into Christ.” This would mean that the ‘baptism’ spoken of was a reference to water, or doctrine.
- Paul uses the phrase the same way we would say to another believer, “If you’re saved, then...” There is no intent to imply that the person may not be saved. Rather, the intent is to state a truth. This would limit the use of ‘baptism’ to Holy Spirit baptism.

Verse 25 states Paul’s contention. The context of the verses 26 -29 is to show that the justified believer is part of the family of God. Beginning in 4:1, Paul describes the relationship to the Father that the family member has when they are a ‘child’. Next, he contrasts that relationship with the one that exists after the child comes of age. It seems clear, from the flow of the argument that the baptism spoken of in 3:27 refers to Spirit baptism. Other forms of baptism, while they may fit in the verse if the verse were isolated from the scriptures around it, lift the verse out of context when applied.

[Eph.4:5]

Part of the seven things all believers have in common. There is one:

- (1) ‘Body’ (the universal church, the bride of Christ).
- (2) ‘Spirit’ (the Holy Spirit in each believer at salvation).
- (3) ‘Hope’ (the purpose of all discipleship--glory to God).
- (4) ‘Lord’ (Jesus is our sole authority on discipleship).
- (5) ‘Faith’ (saving faith in God’s ability rather than our own).
- (6) ‘baptism’ (Holy Spirit baptism is common to all believers).
- (6) ‘God and Father of all’ (a source of unity, not division).

Only Spirit baptism is shared by all believers. Many may have been water baptized, but not all have had that opportunity and not all have exercised it. Not all have been ‘in-

doctrinated' concerning the faith, but all have been Spirit baptized.

[Col.2:12]

The word "ye" can be traced back through verse 11 (ye), 10 (ye), 8 (you), 7 (ye) to 2:6 where it is evident that the word indicates believers who have been instructed [2:7] in the faith. Since we are not told that these people have all been water baptized, then the use of 'baptize' in 2:12 must refer to either Holy Spirit baptism, or to doctrinal baptism. The distinction is in what causes us to be risen with Christ. It is not our instruction, newfound knowledge, discipleship, etc., but our faith in God's ability to give us new life as easily as He raised Christ from the dead. According to this verse, it is through this 'faith' that we are risen with Christ by the baptism in question. Only Spirit baptism provides life. Only Spirit baptism is part of our being made 'new creatures'.

[Tit.3:5]

The word "regeneration" refers to rebirth. It is by the act of being 'born again' that we are 'washed' (cleansed) from the penalty of sin and our fellowship with God is restored (renewing of the Holy Spirit).

[Jn.3:5]

Most denominations that teach water baptism as a prerequisite for salvation teach that this verse ("born of water") refers to water baptism. Denominations that don't believe that water baptism is a prerequisite to salvation usually teach that the verse is referring to 'doctrinal baptism' as it concerns salvation (usually referring to the water as 'water of the Word').

Neither case is correct. The use of "born of water" is a reference to amniotic fluid. Some self-professing scholars have tried to opt out of this conclusion by claiming that it introduces idiomatic uncertainties. These arguments are simply not convincing. What is convincing is Christ's explanation of what He means in verse 6 and 7. The two births are described as:

- (1) "of the flesh," and
- (2) "of the Spirit."

The first birth is described as being fleshly and something we have all experienced. He continues in 3:7 to say that the second 'birth' is born 'again'. Since Christ uses the expression 'born *again*' to indicate the second birth, then He clearly means to indicate that the 'fleshy' birth is one's first birth. Therefore, the 'water' referred to is amniotic fluid.

Baptism with Fire

[Ma.3:11; Lu.3:16]

This is a reference to judgment in Hell for the unbeliever.

Some would say that the 'fire' represents not only judgment, but also of refining. This

is negated by the distinction made by John the Baptist [Ma.3:12; Lu.3:17]. In those verses, John the Baptist categorizes all people into wheat and chaff. The wheat refers to believers. The chaff refers to unbelievers. When wheat is processed, it leaves behind loose hulls. Those who processed the wheat used the wind to drive off the lighter hulls and leave only the wheat. God has used this illustration before to liken the chaff to sinners and the wind to judgment [Ps.1: 4; Dan.2:35]

Baptism for the Dead

[1Cor.15:29]

The following interpretations concerning this verse are popular:

- (1) It is a metaphorical reference to martyrdom not unlike Christ's baptism of the cup/cross.

From an idiomatic standpoint, this view is not tenable. The interpretation requires the believer to be baptized with a view toward his own death. Both English and Greek idioms provide no support for this.

- (2) It is a reference to Christian leaders who have died so that they may bear witness to the dead.

The problem with this is that there is only one chance at life and then you are judged [Ps.78:39; Heb.9:27]. A person who has trusted in God's plan for salvation goes to heaven and does not need to be witnessed to. A person who has gone to Hell is beyond the help of any evangelist.

- (3) It's a reference to water baptism being done over the tombs of the dead.

This was Martin Luther's understanding. It was the result of a mistaken belief that water baptism was necessary to get to heaven. Such a practice was common among the heretical sect of Marcionites as reported by Chrysostom. The belief was (and is) strongly entrenched in Roman Catholicism and various Protestant denominations today.

- (4) John Calvin thought it referred to believers who asked to be water baptized because they were in fear (or danger) of dying.

This also is a result of a belief that water baptism is required for salvation.

- (5) It is a reference to water baptism done because of the testimony of martyrs or dead relatives.

This view is only credible if one believes that Paul did not condemn the practice, but only mentioned it in passing. Most people do not see any condemnation by Paul and, therefore, hold to this interpretation.

I believe that Paul does condemn the practice, but not so directly as to invite immediate notice. It seems, to me, that Paul is being very sarcastic with the factional leaders of the church for not recognizing the inherent error of their own doctrines. It's as if he was saying,

“Why has this even come to me? This is blatantly false, as I will show you, but what surprises me more is that you argue among yourselves about the finer details of your doc-

trines (thinking that the problem is there) while the whole time the ‘problem’ is being manifested through obvious error in your day to day religious practice. You bury your head in theological sand while you are drowning in obvious error and you don’t even recognize it.”

He first states that the doctrine that there was no resurrection flies in the face of the Christian hope that they *say* they hold. This is not ‘finer questions of theology’ as the factions so egotistically and blindly assumed it to be. This shows that their doctrine can be easily shot full of holes and is theological evidence of the lack of credibility that *should* have existed among the factional leadership that supported this view. He further shows that it is not only a matter of doctrine where this distinction becomes evident, but that it was also evident in religious practice. *If* there is no resurrection of the dead (as some of them taught), then why wasn’t the practice of ‘baptism for the dead’ questioned? There probably wasn’t a single person in that church that wasn’t capable of recognizing that inconsistency, yet it, apparently, had not been raised as an issue. This goes to support the conclusion that the Corinthian church was so polluted by their own religious ‘piety’ that they were incapable of recognizing the stench of their own lifestyle.

Whatever view you may hold at least one certain truth is still evident. Paul does not support the practice. That is to say, that when scripture is silent on a topic it does not mean that it is supportive of it.

Infant Baptism

Infant baptism is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. The conditions of water baptism were such that the one being baptized understood the illustrative role of the tradition. This is clearly not possible in infant baptism. The practice began with early heretical sects and the mistaken doctrine that water baptism was a requirement for salvation. In order to assure that children who had the misfortune to die at a young age would go to heaven the parents were urged to have them baptized as infants. The practice had a ring of authority to it in parallels with the Old Testament practice of presenting the Jewish infant in the Temple. In evangelical strongholds, the practice continues in many Protestant churches. However, the emphasis is redirected toward the role of ‘infant dedication’. Don’t be fooled. The churches still teach infant baptism as a necessity, but they clothe it in the doctrinal respectability of ‘dedication’ so that the pill is easier to swallow.