



PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY JOURNAL[®]

A Herald of New Covenant Theology

In Loving Memory of Jackson & Barbara Boyett, and Charles Sild

– 1 Corinthians 15:58 –

“...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (NASB).

–ISSUE 1–NOVEMBER 2014–

Why Providence Theological Seminary Journal?

by Gary D. Long

It has often been said by Baptists that the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation was good in so far as it went, but that it was never completed. The Particular Baptists of England and their theological successors have attempted to complete the Reformation through the outworking of a Christ-centered emphasis upon the nature of the Church, which is Christ’s spiritual body expressed through baptism of believers only. This journal (PTSJ) is an attempt to help establish a biblical hermeneutic that will, in the spirit of Aquila and Priscilla’s dealing with Apollos (Acts 18:24-26), explain the way of God more accurately than that found in the theological systems of Covenant Theology (CT) and Dispensational Theology (DT). The driving motive is “*Back to the Bible*.” The establishment of a better biblical hermeneutic is what this journal and the developing theological system of New Covenant Theology (NCT) is about. The major objective of NCT is that its hermeneutic will help reform and bring doctrinal unity in this sin-wrecked world by helping to break down the middle walls of doctrinal partition that exist within and between CT and DT. The time has now come to bring about the completion of the Reformation by trumpeting yet again, *sola Scriptura*.

This reform, if it is to come about, must come from the development of the discipline of biblical theology which has the theology of the Bible as its object. Such an approach stems from the teachings of the Bible itself rather than

systems of theology which are or profess to be in accord with the Bible. It is in this latter sense that the Christian Church has gone astray to the degree that its systems are not based upon the Bible itself.

The difficulty with biblical theology lies in the fact that the Christian Church has continually made closed systems out of theology when the Bible does not fully support any such humanly-developed closed system. Biblical theology, however, teaches that Christ is the center of salvation history. Any system of theology, therefore, which does not base its method of interpretation upon Christ as the theological center of history will not be as biblical as it should be. But, since the prophetic Scriptures have their fulfillment in the person and work of Christ, biblical theology must take as its starting point a Christ-centered interpretation of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. It must be based upon the way in which the New Testament interprets the Old. The principle of interpretation that the risen Christ sets forth in the gospel of Luke for the Emmaus disciples must become ours as it was for the Apostles. Christ’s redemptive exposition “in all the scriptures” of “the things concerning Himself” must become the pattern for our understanding of “Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27). How we go about developing this pattern of biblical theology is where the difficulty arises and remains the challenge now and for the future. “**Why PTSJ?**” The mission for PTSJ is to faithfully work to help meet this challenge by an unwavering stance based upon “*Back to the Bible*” by “*sola Scriptura*” all to the glory of God.

FINIS.

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- Council on Biblical Theology,**
July 20-23, 2015 in Franklin, TN
- New PTS Blog Series:**
“The Fundamentals of NCT”
- Special SKYPE Classes for Groups:**
(Limited Availability)
[The Trinity:](#) 10 January – March 7, 2015
[Islam:](#) March 14 – May 9, 2015

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Historical Forerunners of New Covenant Theology - Part 1

by Zachary S. Maxcey¹

During the period of 1977 to 1980, New Covenant Theology began to emerge as a developing theological system. It is a theological system that endeavors to break down the walls of doctrinal partition within and between Dispensational Theology and Covenant Theology. New Covenant Theology seeks to accomplish this goal by incorporating what it considers to be the strengths of both systems while at the same time questioning those presuppositions which it considers to be inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible. That being said, New Covenant Theology is not developing in a theological vacuum. Like Dispensationalism or Covenant Theology, it also has its own historical and biblical roots. What is the historical lineage of New Covenant Theology? Advocates of New Covenant Theology claim that there is a demonstrable historical relationship between their own theological system and the first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists² (ca. 1630-60 A.D.), who in turn were *in part* theological descendants of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, especially regarding the nature of the church.



The purpose of this article is to evince that a significant *theological* and *historical* relationship does exist

between advocates of New Covenant Theology and the sixteenth-century Anabaptists as well as the first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists. The first major section will highlight the significant commonalities between the Swiss and South German Anabaptists and proponents of New Covenant Theology, while the second will demonstrate that a relationship *did* exist between those Anabaptists and the first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists. The third major section will examine the strong similarities between New Covenant Theology and first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptist Theology. The fourth section will examine the theological shift of the second-generation English Particular Baptists, while the final section will investigate the writings of John Owen to determine whether or not proponents of New Covenant Theology can *legitimately* claim this scholar-theologian as a theological forerunner.

The Swiss and South-German Anabaptists: Misjudged Heroes of the Reformation

Perhaps some today will be surprised that a sincere, objective investigation of sixteenth-century Anabaptists³ will uncover significant non-soteriological commonalities existing between New Covenant Theology proponents and the Swiss and South German Anabaptists. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, the Anabaptists have largely been characterized as theological radicals and heretics. William Estep rightly observes: "Perhaps there is no group within Christian history that has been judged as unfairly

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²In general, *Particular* Baptists ascribe to believer's baptism and a Calvinistic soteriology, whereas *General* Baptists hold to believer's baptism and an Arminian soteriology.

³Anabaptists, meaning "re-baptizers," comes from the combination of the Greek words *ana* ("again") and *baptizō* ("baptize").

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(the new covenant) the promised everlasting covenant secured, ratified and established by the Person & Work of Jesus Christ that fulfills all the covenants in the Old Testament Scriptures; a covenant in which all believers have full forgiveness of sins, are indwelt by the Spirit, and are empowered by the Spirit to please God; this covenant established the Church as Christ's spiritual body.

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 2)

as the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.”⁴ Relying upon the biased secondary accounts of the Catholic Church and magisterial reformers,⁵ historians have largely misjudged them, highlighting instead the Rationalists,⁶ Inspirationists,⁷ and Münsterites⁸ as typical representatives of mainstream Anabaptism.⁹

The Origin of the Anabaptist Movement

The Anabaptist movement was born in Zürich, Switzerland when

students¹⁰ of Ulrich (Huldrych/Huldreich)¹¹ Zwingli, Zürich’s leading reformer, were irrevocably convinced that the New Testament Scriptures advocated the practice of believer’s baptism, not *paedobaptism*.¹² Estep writes: “The public break between Zwingli and his erstwhile disciples came with evident finality at a fateful disputation in January, 1525. The council proclaimed Zwingli the victor and denounced the radicals. The alternatives were quite clear. The little group could conform, leave Zürich, or face imprisonment. It chose the last.”¹³ Very soon after, this small band of like-minded men united their words with sincere action, each being baptized as a believer on the evening of

January 21, 1525 in “the home of Felix Manz.”¹⁴ “Anabaptism was born. With this first baptism, the earliest church of the Swiss Brethren was constituted.”¹⁵ From its very beginnings, the Anabaptist movement encountered hostility from both Roman Catholics and Protestants, in the form of expulsion, imprisonment, torture, and very often martyrdom. Leading members of the Swiss and South German strains of Anabaptism include Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Michael Sattler, Balthasar Hübmaier,¹⁶ and Pilgram Marpeck.¹⁷

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⁴William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963; reprint 1975, 1996), 1. I highly encourage New Covenant believers of all denominations, backgrounds, and ages to read Estep’s *Anabaptist Story* for three reasons. First, it is important to educate believers that not all of the Anabaptists were radicals or heretics. Many sixteenth-century Anabaptists were in fact orthodox in their beliefs, especially on the nature of the church. Historians have largely misjudged them, preferring to highlight the Münsterites or the Inspirationists as typical representatives of mainstream Anabaptism. Second, many Anabaptist beliefs such as believer’s baptism and the regenerate nature of the Church serve as foundational distinctives of the Baptist movement, both in its Particular and General forms. Third, there *appears* to be a relationship, both historical and doctrinal, between evangelical Anabaptism and many different Christian groups such as the English Separatists, the English and American Baptists, and advocates of New Covenant Theology.

⁵The ‘magisterial’ reformers were the more prominent members of the Protestant Reformation, such as Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, John Knox, and others. For examples of the magisterial response to the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, see John Calvin, *Treatises against the Anabaptists and against the Libertines*, trans. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1982) and John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists* (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1964).

⁶See Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 23. He writes, “The rationalists, as the term implies, put primary emphasis on the place of reason in interpreting the Scriptures. For the most part the evangelical rationalists were antitrinitarian, but they were antitrinitarian because they were rationalists and not the reverse. Reason, therefore, and not Scripture or special revelation became for them the source of ultimate authority.”

⁷See Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 22. Estep writes, “For the inspirationists the Spirit took precedence over the Bible. Thus the immediate illumination of the Spirit became the norm for the inspirationist’s program of reform. The Zwickau prophets, Nicolaus Storch, and Thomas Münzter, claimed special revelation, as did later inspirationists.” In general, the Inspirationist Anabaptists belittled the role of the Holy Scriptures in the life of a believer. Instead, they gave preeminence to the “guiding” role of the Holy Spirit, thus pitting the Spirit against *His* Word. This theologically-perilous and unbiblical approach allowed Inspirationist Anabaptists to be guided by their “spiritual” experiences rather than the Word of God. It goes without saying that the Holy Spirit *never* operates in a manner that contradicts the very Scriptures that He inspired.

⁸The Münsterites were radical members of the Anabaptist movement, whose infamous notoriety stems from the *violent* over-realized eschatology which they espoused. This eschatology eventually resulted in the Münster Rebellion which was quickly and decisively crushed by the leaders of medieval Germany in 1535 A.D.

⁹Two factors primarily contribute to the misrepresentation of the Anabaptists. First, the more fringe elements of the Anabaptist movement, such as the Münsterites or the Inspirationists, have often been highlighted as the typical representatives of mainstream Anabaptism. For the second, see Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 1. Historical accounts frequently rely “heavily upon the highly partisan and quite unreliable accounts of sixteenth-century Anabaptism in the writings of Ulrich Zwingli, Justus Menius, Heinrich Bullinger, and Christoph Fischer, to say nothing of the milder but just as erroneous accounts of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon.”

¹⁰This group of students consisted of (but was not limited to) such men as Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz.

¹¹Different spellings occur for Zwingli’s first name. He is also called Ulrich perhaps after his father, Ulrich Zwingli.

¹²*Paedobaptism* is a theological term used to describe the practice of infant baptism.

¹³Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 12-13.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶See Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, ed. by William R. Estep, Jr. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 39. Bergsten describes Hübmaier with the following words, “For a long time, Hubmaier has been given a place of honor in Baptist scholarship and fellowship. He is generally regarded as the most important Anabaptist leader. There is also a readiness to recognize in him a spiritual brother who represented in all essentials the major principles of the English Baptist movement which emerged in the early seventeenth century.”

¹⁷For more information concerning these prominent Anabaptists, see Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 29-235.

new covenant theology a theological system which stresses that Jesus Christ is the nexus & climax of God’s plan in redemptive history, that the New Testament Scriptures have interpretive priority over the Old Testament Scriptures, and that the new covenant truly is a new arrangement between God and man; this system also strives to maintain the biblical tension of continuity and discontinuity found in Scripture.

– 2 Timothy 2:15 –

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (NASB).

Baptism: the Pledge of Membership in the New Covenant

by Jackson Boyett

(This article is an abridged version of a message delivered at the 2009 PTS Conference.)

Who is in the new covenant, which was promised by Jeremiah and is now in effect? The question is not, "Who was in the old covenant?" Who are the members of the new covenant? My text today is 1 Peter 3:18-22:

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (NIV).

First, I want to say a word about Peter and his authority concerning baptism. He was, after all, present when Jesus uttered the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...." (ESV). Peter was the man who preached the first Christian sermon on the day of Pentecost. And he ended that sermon with a command to the Jews under conviction that they should repent and be baptized.

He also was the instrument that God used to bring the first Gentiles into the church in the house of Cornelius. And there he called for water so that those new converts might be baptized. Each of these incidents, which we will look at in greater detail, contributed to Peter's authority on the subject of baptism. And when you add to that natural authority his *apostolic* authority, and the fact that he was given the keys of the kingdom and so on, he was supremely qualified to teach on this or any other subject on which the Lord instructed him. But we cannot help but notice Peter's personal and experiential credentials on this subject of baptism.

"...baptism is for believers only – for those who have a good conscience toward God, the people Jeremiah prophesied would be members of the new covenant."

Now what's interesting about our text is not that Peter gives us a strange and difficult doctrine that some of you may be hoping that I'm going to explain about Jesus going and preaching to the spirits in prison. I'm not going to deal with that today. In my opinion, you may find the best explanation for that passage in Wayne Grudem's commentary, and his position is that when Noah was building the ark, Christ "in Spirit" was preaching through Noah to unbelievers who were on the earth then, but are now spirits in prison – in hell.¹ Interesting as that is, it's not as interesting as Peter's description of baptism. Why? Because Peter is the only writer in the Bible who calls baptism anything. He's the only writer who labels baptism. He's the only

¹Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, The Tyndale Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 204.

writer who identifies baptism as something. Preachers and theologians call it things. We call it a sacrament, or an ordinance, or an initiatory rite. In Reformed circles it is most commonly called a sign, or the sign of the covenant. The Westminster Confession calls it a seal also. And I find this absolutely fascinating that, while it may indeed be some of those things, the *Bible never uses any of those terms to describe it*. Those are all man-made terms.

Now we use such man-made terms for convenience in communication – for example, the term "Trinity," which never occurs in Scripture, but which is, nonetheless, a term identifying a true doctrine. So there's nothing wrong with some good man-made terms as long as they reflect the situation accurately and label fairly and truthfully. We need truth and accuracy in our labeling of theological concepts. But I think it would do us good to look closely at the one thing that baptism is specifically *called* in the Bible, because it is never called anything other than this, "the pledge of a clear conscience toward God" (NIV). Some of you have seen another possible translation of those words in the ESV or the New American Standard Bible, "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (NASB, ESV). For the moment, please grant the translation, "the pledge of a good conscience toward God," and I'll explain in due time why I reject the other rendering.

Now in calling baptism this (i.e. "the pledge"), Peter supports (1) what Jesus taught him, and (2) the understanding of baptism that he himself experienced and applied, namely, that baptism is for believers only – for those who have a good conscience toward God, the people Jeremiah prophesied would be members of the new covenant.

This, of course, opens up the sad division in the Reformed camp. Reformed Baptists hold to believer's baptism only, and the rest of the Reformed churches do not. Naturally, we Baptists want unity in

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telos: a word of Greek origin meaning *end* or *goal*.

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Christotelic hermeneutics: a method of interpretation that emphasizes that the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate goal or end of God's Word and seeks to consistently interpret all Scripture in view of this great truth.

(Baptism: NC Pledge Continued from Page 4)

the world of Reformed Christianity. We do not want our Presbyterian and other Reformed brothers to think that we are bumbling idiots when it comes to Scripture. Many of them no doubt believe that we are just not able to see into the Bible as deeply as they do. C.H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher who was raised by parents and grandparents committed to infant baptism, said, “If we could find infant baptism in the word of God, we would adopt it. But we have looked well through the Bible and cannot find it, and do not believe it is there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Scriptures, unless they themselves first put it there.”

In other words, if we are going to look at Scripture alone, not at tradition, nor even at the history of the church, we cannot come to any other conclusion than that baptism is only for believing members of the new covenant. I might add, however, that we Baptists do not come off so badly if we look at the history of the church. The earliest church manual, the *Didache*, which was written probably no later than the year 125 A.D., has a long, involved prescription for how to baptize, and the baptism is clearly of a believer and the method is immersion. There are no instructions for baptizing infants whatsoever. Instead the catechumen is to be taught all of these things that are in this church manual, and then he is to be baptized in running water. If he cannot get that, use warm water, the manual says. But the point is that, even though we will not rest our arguments on church history, we can say that the earliest post-apostolic record clearly shows that baptism of believers by immersion was the practice of the church.

Now, again I say, Scripture is what is important. It is Scripture that must dictate our practice and belief concerning this doctrine. But when I say that baptism is for believers only, I am saying again

that baptism is for members of the new covenant. It is for those people described in Jeremiah 31, and also in Hebrew 8:7-13. And Peter is teaching in this text that baptism is the pledge of membership in the new covenant.

Now how do you get in the new covenant? You get in the new covenant through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You get in the new covenant because God has birthed you again, put his law in your heart, you know him and have eternal life and you have your sins forgiven. And all of that is accomplished for you through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in his atonement and in his sending of the Spirit. You receive all that by faith and you become part of the new covenant. But then, the next step, the very next step of obedience according to Scripture, is baptism. But it is for believers only.

“But when I say that baptism is for believers only, I am saying again that baptism is for members of the new covenant.”

In our church [Dayspring Fellowship – <http://dsf.org/>] we actually withhold the Lord’s supper until the new believer has committed himself to the Lord in baptism, and submitted to this pledge of a good conscience toward God. This leads to some interesting situations. One thing it leads to is the submission of many believers who want to take communion, but who have stubbornly refused to be obedient to Jesus and be baptized....Christians should not delay in being baptized and should be baptized before partaking of the Lord’s Supper. I don’t believe that you should have the privilege of the Lord’s table until the issue about your baptism has been settled in your heart. Now, in fencing the table, we do not press the necessity of believer’s baptism as such, because we

know that among our Reformed friends that this is a very strongly held and deeply felt issue that touches the consciences of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not deny the Lord’s Supper to someone who has only been “baptized” as an infant and who feels strongly about it. And so we simply ask that a person consider himself a baptized Christian according to his conscience. But, oh, do we work hard to try to change the conscience!



Consider this description of baptism: the pledge of membership in the new covenant. We’re going to look at the specific designation of baptism as a pledge. And then we’re going to see how this is consistent with Peter’s understanding of baptism. And then, finally, we’ll see how this understanding of baptism is necessary if reformation of the church is to continue in our own day.

First, we had better see about this translation. Certainly the translation, “an appeal to God for a good conscience” is permissible. Not only is this the sense of the ESV and NASB, it is the preferred translation of other *exceptional* scholars. Why would I disagree with such trustworthy authorities? Well, first, the word for “pledge” or “appeal” is only used here in the New Testament. It’s the word *eperotema*. The verb form of it is indeed “to make a request, a demand, or an appeal” (See Matt. 16:1). So translating the noun as an “appeal” makes sense. The problem is the usage of the word in the papyri, where its meaning is plain. It’s a word that comes from the business and legal world, and it means “a pledge to abide by the terms of a contract.”

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divine covenant: a God-established, Sovereignly-imposed, solemn arrangement of stipulations, instituted in time, whereby Yahweh freely & graciously communes with man.

– Matthew 17:5 –

“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (NASB).

semper reformanda: Latin for “always reforming;” the Protestant theological maxim detailing the church’s need to constantly reassess and conform her theology to the truth of Scripture.

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 3)

Anabaptist Teachings regarding the Scriptures

The first strong commonality which exists between New Covenant Theology and the Swiss and South German strains of Anabaptism involves the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture. First, like most Protestant Reformers, these Anabaptists employed the principle of *sola Scriptura*.¹⁸ Estep notes the following:

The one sure touchstone of the Reformation and clear line of demarcation between Roman Catholics and Reformers was the authority of the Scriptures. **Within the Reformation no group took more seriously the principle of *sola Scriptura* in matters of doctrine and discipline than did the true Anabaptists.** In this regard the Reformation stance of the Anabaptists is unequivocal. The authoritative position of the Scriptures among the sixteenth-century Anabaptists was apparent from the beginning. **The Bible became and remained for them the supreme judicature by which all human opinions were to be tried [emphasis mine].**¹⁹

Second, like other Reformers, they advocated the study of the Scriptures in their original languages, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Third, the "Swiss and South German Anabaptists" considered

"the New Testament, in particular the life and teachings of Christ" to be "the final authority for the Christian life and the faith and order of the church."²⁰ Concerning Hübmaier, Estep writes: "...Hübmaier...did honestly attempt to discover what the Scriptures taught and to exegete them faithfully. It is also evident that the New Testament became for him the sole authority for the Christian life and the life of the church."²¹ Fourth, mainstream Anabaptists interpreted the Scriptures with a Christocentric hermeneutic. For example, Estep writes, "While they tended to interpret the Scriptures in a literal sense, they were Christocentric. It was Christ who in the actual formulation of the faith became the ultimate authority to which they appealed."²² Fifth, they sought to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures in the light of the New Testament. Estep states:

Although they did not reject the Old Testament in a Marcionite fashion, **it was never allowed to take precedence over the New Testament or to become normative for the Christian faith.** Theirs was a New Testament hermeneutic that assumed a progression in the biblical revelation that culminated in the Christ-event. **Therefore the Old Testament, although useful and often quoted, could never stand alone, unqualified by the New Testament [emphasis mine].**²³

Elsewhere, he writes concerning Pilgram Marpeck's hermeneutic:

Marpeck's most creative contribution

¹⁸*Sola Scriptura* is a Latin phrase, meaning "by the Scriptures alone," which has served as a prominent rallying cry for Protestant theologians since the days of the Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* was used by Protestants to indicate that the Scriptures are the **sole** authority of faith and practice for the Christian.

¹⁹Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 190.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 22.

²¹*Ibid.*, 97. See also Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 275. Bergsten writes, "When the Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, they were acting in accordance with Zwingli's original understanding of Scripture. But since Zwingli was not prepared to draw this conclusion from the New Testament, he [Hübmaier] felt obliged to change his hermeneutics."

²²*Ibid.*, 22.

²³*Ibid.*

Spirit baptism: the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit begun at Pentecost (and continued in its apostolic extensions) that created the Church, the spiritual Body of Christ.

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PTS BLOG† CORNER

The Fundamentals of New Covenant Theology

- Part 1 -

Editor's Note: This Series Is
Currently Featured on
the PTS Blog Site.

Many have rightly described New Covenant Theology (NCT) as a *via media*, that is to say, a *middle way* between the two theological paradigms which dominate *evangelical Protestantism*: Dispensational Theology and Covenant Theology. Advocates of NCT maintain that Covenant Theology *overemphasizes* the continuity of Scripture, while Dispensational Theology *overemphasizes* the discontinuity of Scripture. In contradistinction, NCT strives to maintain the 'continuity-discontinuity' tension which significantly pervades the Holy Writ by means of both Christocentric hermeneutics and a biblical theology.

NCT acknowledges that God has **one** overarching redemptive purpose. For example, Ephesians 1:10 declares that the elect were "predestined according to His [God's] **purpose** who works all things after the counsel of His will" (NASB). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul states that the Church reveals God's manifold wisdom and that this revelation "was in accordance with the **eternal purpose** which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11, NASB). Elsewhere, Paul teaches that the Lord saved His people and called them "with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to **His own purpose** and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (2 Tim. 1:9, NASB). Unlike Covenant Theology, however,

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sola scriptura: Latin for "Scripture alone;" the Protestant theological maxim encapsulating the truth that Scripture (which is the inspired, infallible, & inerrant Word of God) is the **sole** authority of faith & practice for the believer.

(Fundamentals of NCT Continued from Page 6)

NCT ardently affirms that God's eternal purpose is **not** to be understood as a covenant (e.g. the over-arching *covenant of grace* of Covenant Theology). Proponents of NCT assert that Covenant Theology's *covenant of grace* is an unnecessary theological deduction, as Scripture does not describe God's eternal purpose (Greek: *prothesis*; Eph. 1:10, 3:10-11; 2 Tim. 1:9) as a covenant (*diathēkē*). Many supporters of NCT also refer to God's eternal purpose as 'God's kingdom purpose', referencing Matthew 6:10: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (NASB) (See Gary D. Long, *NCT: Time for a More Accurate Way*, Amazon.com, 2013). As is to be expected, NCT differs with Dispensational Theology's two redemptive plans for the Church and Israel.

NCT maintains that God's eternal purpose is not only worked out *progressively* in the biblical covenants of the Old Testament but also *ultimately* fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant. In essence, these covenants furnish the redemptive-historical framework through which the biblical narrative is steadily advanced. The covenants of Scripture realize their *telos* (i.e. the end, goal) in Christ Jesus and the covenant of which He is the mediator – namely, the New Covenant. It is worth noting that the biblical covenants distinctly manifest the Scriptural 'continuity-discontinuity' tension – particularly, with regard to how they are to be understood in light of one another.

NCT

New Covenant Theology

TIME FOR A MORE ACCURATE WAY

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covenant theology a theological system stressing the elements of continuity between the Old & New Testament Scriptures; this system holds the concept of covenant to be the central, unifying theme of God's Word – specifically its covenant of works / covenant of grace schema; among its other distinctives are God's one redemptive plan, the Decalogue as God's eternal, moral law, and Sunday as a Christian Sabbath; also known as Reformed Theology.

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 6)

to Anabaptist thought was his view of the Scriptures. While holding the Scriptures to be the Word of God, he made a distinction between the purpose of the Old Testament and that of the New. As the foundation must be distinguished from the house, the Old Testament must be distinguished from the New. ***The New Testament was centered in Jesus Christ and alone was authoritative for the Brethren. To hold that the Old Testament was equally authoritative for the Christian was to abolish the distinction between the two. Failure to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments leads to the most dire consequences.*** Marpeck attributed the peasants' revolt, Zwingli's death, and the excesses of the Münsterites to this cause. Making the Old Testament normative for the Christian life is to follow the Scriptures only in part. ***In Marpeck's eyes the pope, Luther, Zwingli, and the 'false Anabaptists' were all guilty of this fundamental error [emphasis mine].***²⁴

Proponents of New Covenant Theology stand in agreement with the Swiss and South German Anabaptists regarding this interpretation of Scripture.

Anabaptist Views regarding Baptism and the Nature of the Church

The second similarity between New Covenant Theology and the Swiss and South German strains of Anabaptism involves the practice of *believer's baptism*. Their study of the Scriptures in the original languages, coupled with the

principle of *sola Scriptura*, led Anabaptists to reject *paedobaptism*²⁵ in favor of *believer's baptism*. Estep correctly notes, "Believer's baptism was for the Anabaptists the logical implementation of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Almost as soon as the Anabaptist movement could be distinguished within the context of the Reformation itself, believers' baptism became the major issue."²⁶ Later, he succinctly summarizes the typical Anabaptist view of baptism:

In opposition to the usual arguments for infant baptism the Brethren set forth their position, underscoring the basic insights of Anabaptism. ***First, the nature of baptism rules out the possibility of infant baptism.*** New Testament baptism requires prior conviction for, and repentance of sin, and faith in Christ. Baptism is viewed as a symbol of initiation into the church and sign of the new life which the believer has in Christ. "In other words, baptism is to be administered only after receiving the Holy Spirit; and children, though they are not necessarily condemned, do not have the Holy Spirit."

Second, baptism is a symbol and not a sacrament. It has no meaning where faith in Christ is absent. Third, Christ has set for us an example through his own baptism. Fourth, through the Great Commission, he has explicitly commanded us to teach and baptize. Fifth, baptism is not analogous to circumcision [emphasis mine].²⁷

The Anabaptist acceptance and practice of believer's baptism led to a new, distinctive view of the Church, which *fundamentally* differed from that of the

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²⁴Ibid., 126.

²⁵Again, *paedobaptism* is a theological term used to describe the practice of infant baptism.

²⁶Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 201.

²⁷Ibid., 206.

– Luke 24:44b –

"...all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (NASB).

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 7)

Roman Catholics and magisterial Reformers. Because they believed that baptism was only for committed, confessing believers, the Anabaptists resultantly believed that the New Testament Church is a body composed *solely* of regenerate believers who had identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in believer's baptism. Estep describes Hübmaier's view regarding the nature of the true church:

The first mark of the true church, according to Hübmaier, is regeneration. Regeneration must precede membership. *Of course, in Anabaptist thought there can be no scriptural baptism without the prior experience of regeneration, and no church membership without baptism.*

It, therefore, follows that regeneration must be an accomplished fact before one is enrolled in the visible church [emphasis mine].²⁸

New Covenant Theology adherents *certainly* agree with the Swiss and South German Anabaptists regarding the practice of believer's baptism and the teaching that the Church is a body composed *solely* of regenerate believers who have identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in believer's baptism. These significant commonalities indicate a relationship between the Swiss and South German Anabaptists and many other Christian groups such as the English Separatists, the English and

American Baptists, and advocates of New Covenant Theology.

The Relationship between the Anabaptists and First-Generation Seventeenth-Century English Particular Baptists

Although the Anabaptist movement originated in Zürich, Switzerland, it quickly spread into such areas as Germany and Holland. Under the guidance of Menno Simons, a prominent and instrumental Dutch Anabaptist, the movement thrived and became firmly entrenched in Dutch territory. Moreover, Holland served as the

“New Covenant Theology adherents *certainly* agree with the Swiss and South German Anabaptists with regard to the practice of believer's baptism and the teaching that the Church is a body composed solely of regenerate believers who have identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in believer's baptism.”

predominant fountainhead of Reformation thought, which included Anabaptist theology, into medieval England. B. R. White confirms the presence of Anabaptists in England as early as the reign of Henry VIII (1509 – 1547): “Long before John Smyth [1570 – 1612] and Thomas Helwys [1575 – 1616] there had been ‘Anabaptists’ (that is, ‘re-baptizers’) in England. Although Henry VIII had caught a few and burned some, most, if not all, of these had been foreigners.”²⁹

Although most historians will concede that there was an Anabaptist presence in medieval England, few are willing to argue in favor of a relationship between the Anabaptists and the first-generation English Particular Baptists. Estep describes this unwillingness: “The relationship of continental Anabaptism to early English Baptist has long been subject to debate. However, in recent years it seems to be the vogue to discredit any viewpoint that posits an Anabaptist-Baptist historical relation.”³⁰ Representing this recent approach, White argues against such:

It is certainly more plausible to argue for the likelihood of influence from some Anabaptists upon seventeenth-century English Baptist beginnings than it is from Anabaptism upon the earlier Separatists. Even so, it should be noted that two careful studies seeking to estimate the influence of Anabaptism upon both General and Calvinistic Baptists origins found that no significant influence could be decisively proved.³¹

Even Estep, who is favorable to the Anabaptists, denies a direct relationship between the Anabaptists and the first-generation English Particular Baptists. He writes, “To claim that Baptists...are *direct* descendants of the Anabaptists is to assume that similarity of belief proves *causal* connections. Such relationship is assumed from something other than historical evidence. However, this is not to deny the pervasive *influence* of sixteenth-century Anabaptism upon succeeding generations but to point up the task of the historian [emphasis mine].”³²

²⁸Ibid., 245.

²⁹B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the 17th Century* (Didcot, England: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 15.

³⁰Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 271.

³¹White, *The English Baptists*, 17. See also Bergsten, *Balthasar Hübmaier*, 46. Bergsten states, “...Baptist scholars have frequently regarded him as the forerunner of Baptist and Free Church movements of more recent times. On this question, one can say that at the most Hübmaier can be regarded as a prototype of the Baptist movement. However, there can be no talk of a direct historical and doctrinal continuity between the reformer at Waldshut and his Baptist sympathizers of later times.”

³²Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 267.

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<http://nct-blog.ptsco.org/>

dispensational theology a theological system that stresses the elements of discontinuity between the Old & New Testament Scriptures; this system divides redemptive history into a number of distinct time periods known as dispensations; among its other distinctives are its sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal millennial kingdom, a pretribulation rapture, and a restoration of national Israel.

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 8)

The event whereby the first-generation³³ seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists both surfaced historically and asserted themselves theologically was the publication of the 1644 First London Baptist Confession (FLBC). White notes, "The Calvinistic Baptists first appeared as a self-conscious group with the publication of their Confession in London in 1644."³⁴ The vast majority of the 1644 FLBC is derived from the 1596 True Confession of Faith (TCF), a Congregationalist confession authored by Francis Johnson, thus indicating that "the basic orientation of the Particular Baptists clearly was and remained non-separatist Congregational Calvinist, and not Anabaptist."³⁵ Surely, if any influence existed between the Anabaptists and the first-generation Particular Baptists of England, such a relationship would be demonstrable from the 1644 First London Baptist Confession (FLBC). Does the Confession actually support a relationship? Indeed, it does. For example, Article XL of the 1644 FLBC significantly deviates from the 1596 TCF's understanding of believer's baptism:

The way and manner of the¹dispensing of this Ordinance, the Scripture holds out to be dipping or plunging the whole body under water: it being a sign, must answer the thing signified, which are these: first, the²washing the whole soul in the blood of Christ: Secondly, that interest the Saints have in the³death, burial, and resurrection; thirdly, together with a⁴confirmation of our faith, that as certainly as the body is buried under water,

and rises again, so certainly shall the bodies of the Saints be raised by the power of Christ, in the day of the resurrection, to reign with Christ.... The word Baptize, signifying to dip under water, yet as with convenient garments both upon the administrator and subject with all modesty.¹Matt. 3:16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38; ²Rev. 1:5 & 7:14 with Heb. 10:22; ³Rom. 6:3, 4, 5; ⁴1 Cor. 15:28, 29 [modern spelling mine].³⁶

Glen Stassen states:

The central motif of the Baptist innovation is an interpretation of baptism which is discontinuous not only from the Congregational doctrine of baptism, but from all the Congregational doctrines. The convictions which it presupposes are absent from Congregational thought....**The central conviction involved in the new interpretation of baptism is the concentration on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ [emphasis mine].**³⁷

How do we account for this significant difference between the 1596 TCF and the 1644 FLBC?

Stassen convincingly demonstrates that the Christological emphasis in the 1644 FLBC's definition of baptism is strongly representative of Dutch Anabaptist thought. He writes:

Menno Simons' *Foundation-Book* exactly fulfills all the requirements for explaining every detail of the Baptist innovations....The *Foundation-Book* was likely to have been available to the Baptists, both because of its widespread distribution and because it was the book which shaped the basic doctrines of the Mennonites. The

frequency with which it was republished is phenomenal. Its Dutch publication dates before 1640 are 1539, 1558, 1562, 1565, 1567, 1579 [2], 1583, 1613, 1616 and two undated editions published in German in 1575.... The overall emphases of the *Foundation-Book* are strikingly similar to the emphases of the Baptist innovations. Menno stresses discipleship, repentance, faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christ as Lord and example, along with an appeal to the magistracy. **The section on baptism is even more striking in its similarity to the core of the Baptist pattern. The emphases are almost identical. The order of their presentation is almost identical. The Scripture passages which are mentioned are almost identical. The almost complete identity can be seen readily in the following outline which indicates in order the chief points and Scripture passages in Menno's and the Baptist's sections on baptism.... Then Menno succinctly states the significance of being baptized. Each aspect of the Baptist pattern appears, and the sequence is identical: The ordinance of the Lord, hearing, believing, professing faith, discipleship, death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. The Scripture Menno quotes is the same Scripture which the Baptists quote [emphasis mine].**³⁸

Stassen concludes that there is a significant relationship between the Anabaptists and the first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists:

The Baptists, as we have seen, incorporated Menno's stress on obedience, but they did so in a more

(Continued on Page 10)

³³The first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists encompass the time period of ca. 1630-1660 A.D.

³⁴White, *The English Baptists*, 59.

³⁵Glen H. Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptist," *The Mennonite Quarterly* 36:4 (1962): 324.

³⁶*The Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists* (London: 1644), Article XL [modern spelling and capitalization original].

³⁷Stassen, "Anabaptist Influence," 337.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 341-343.

the old covenant: the conditional treaty which Yahweh established at Mount Sinai with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the covenant synonymous with the Law of Moses; this covenant established Israel as a geo-political entity and was temporary in terms of its duration; this covenantal arrangement was abrogated by Christ's Person & Work and subsequently replaced by the new covenant.

– 2 Corinthians 1:20 –

"For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us" (NASB).

(Historical Forerunners Continued from Page 9)

Calvinist manner....They remain completely within Calvinism, but are influenced by Menno....**The Baptists are Calvinists who incorporate Menno's emphases where they fit into the Calvinist framework, and reject those aspects which do not fit. They ignore Menno's distinction between inward and outward baptism and instead speak of the baptism of Christ, meaning His death, burial, and resurrection, and God working by that same power in us....To believe that this is mere coincidence is extremely difficult. They stress the same Scripture passages, the same aspects of baptism in the same sequence, except that discipleship is placed differently....**We now see how it was possible for the Baptists to have been influenced by an Anabaptist and yet not adopt "the distinctive features of Anabaptist life and thought"....The evidence seems to suggest that the Baptists did in fact remain Calvinists while being influenced by a Mennonite who, if he was not Menno himself, was a disciple so true that the difference is hard to discern [emphasis mine].³⁹

Some may attempt to counter Stassen's conclusion by arguing that the first-generation English Particular Baptists always sought to distance themselves from the Anabaptists. The introductory words of the 1644 FLBC do verify that

the Particular Baptists did *officially* distance themselves from the Anabaptist movement: "The CONFESSION OF FAITH of those CHURCHES which are commonly (though falsely) called ANABAPTISTS."⁴⁰ The first-generation English Particular Baptists rejected the term 'Anabaptist' (literally "re-baptizer") for *three* reasons. *First*, they, like the Anabaptists, believed

"BEHOLD, THE DAYS
COME, SAITH
THE LORD,
WHEN I WILL MAKE A
NEW COVENANT..."

that only believer's baptism, not infant baptism, was *true* baptism. *Second*, the first-generation English Particular Baptists sought to distance themselves from the infamous excesses of the Rationalists, Inspirationists, and Münsterites which had come to characterize the entire Anabaptist movement.⁴¹ *Third*, they did not characterize themselves as Anabaptist, as they were not in complete doctrine agreement with them, especially concerning *free will, communalism, refusal to take oaths, and the doctrine of original sin*.⁴² For example, the first-generation English Particular Baptists were Calvinistic in their soteriology, while the Anabaptists held to a more semi-Pelagian view of salvation.

Although the Particular Baptists did *officially* distance themselves from the Anabaptist movement, this fact does *not* disprove a relationship between them

and the Anabaptists with regard to the nature of the church and the Law of God for at least *three* reasons. *First*, Anabaptist theology, especially in its Dutch strain, entered medieval England through Holland. *Second*, the first-generation seventeenth-century Particular Baptists of England clearly held views regarding baptism and the nature of the church which were nearly identical to those of the Anabaptists. *Third*, the 1644 FLBC replicates many doctrinal explanations and theological emphases found in Menno Simons' *Foundation-Book*. *Fourth*, it is likely that Benjamin Cox's⁴³ description of New Covenant law is derived from the Anabaptists as well. These *four* facts, especially the last two, indicate that the Anabaptists had a significant influence upon the first-generation seventeenth-century English Particular Baptists.

FINIS.

Here ends Part 1 of "Historical Foreunners of New Covenant Theology" by Zachary S. Maxcey. The second half of this article will be published in the February 2015 issue of the Providence Theological Seminary Journal.



³⁹Ibid., 345-348.

⁴⁰FLBC (1644), Introduction. The 1644 edition of the confession was signed by fifteen men including William Kiffin, Samuel Richardson, John Spilsbery, Thomas Patience, Thomas Skippard, Thomas Munday, Thomas Gore and Thomas Killcop.

⁴¹White, *The English Baptists*, 24-5. White notes, "The smear label 'Anabaptist', which was attached to the Baptists by contemporaries, was itself a term guaranteed to link them with the atrocities which, as all men knew though few knew precisely, had been committed by a violent group of Anabaptists at Münster a century before." The smear label was especially true in the strong attacks made by Daniel Featley, a brilliant liberal clergyman of the Church of England, who wrote a scurrilous work against the 1644 FLBC. See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959; reprint 1969), 147.

⁴²Ibid., 148.

⁴³Benjamin Cox was a seventeenth-century Particular Baptist who wrote an insightful appendix to the 1646 FLBC.

recapitulation: a form of theological parallelism and repetition which features prominently in biblical prophecy.

- Acts 3:24 -

"...likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days" (NASB).

analogia fidei Latin for "the analogy of faith;" an interpretive axiom whereby less clear passages of Scripture are interpreted by clearer biblical passages.

(Baptism: NC Pledge Continued from Page 5)

When you and I sign contracts today, even if we are downloading software on our computers, there is a place where we say, in effect “I agree to the above terms of the contract.” There will be a lot of binding technical language, and then right below that, if it’s a paper contract there will be a line and an “X” where we sign our name. If it’s a contract with the software company, we click on the button that says, “I agree.” When we sign or click we are agreeing to that language. In Peter’s day this last part of binding you to the contract was not done on the contract itself. It was done with a verbal question and answer before a witness, and *that* made the contract legal and binding. The question would be asked, “Do you accept the terms of this contract and bind yourself to observe them?” The witness would hear you answer, “Yes,” and that made the contract valid. Well, the technical term for that question and response was this word, *eperotema* – Peter’s word here. So, Peter is using business language that describes an executor or party to a contract going to his business deal either with the money, or with the intent to render a service for money. The party is prepared before he arrives because of a previous understanding or situation. Peter is saying that, in the same way, when you are baptized, you come with a clear conscience towards God and you say, “Yes” to God by your baptism. You are affirming that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. You are affirming that your sins have been forgiven. You are affirming that, because you are justified by grace through faith, you have a good conscience before God.

Dr. Duane Garrett, professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, gives an example of the kind of pledge of oneself to God that has been expressed by believers from their good consciences – it’s from the 1662 Book of

Common Prayer, and it’s a more formal version of the questions we ask in our church.

Q. Dost thou renounce the devil and his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them?

A. I renounce them all.²

“Peter is saying that, in the same way, when you are baptized, you come with a clear conscience towards God and you say, “Yes” to God by your baptism. You are affirming that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. You are affirming that your sins have been forgiven. You are affirming that, because you are justified by grace through faith, you have a good conscience before God.”

This is an example of someone pledging oneself to be in agreement with God, and it is pledging *from* a good conscience, rather than asking *for* a good conscience. In our text, the word “conscience” is in the genitive case. It can be a subjective genitive (“of” or “from” a good conscience”) or it can be objective (“for” a good conscience). My reason for choosing “of” a good conscience) is that a Christian already has a good conscience before his baptism; that’s because his sins have been forgiven. He need not appeal for a good conscience. He already has that because he has been regenerated, justified, and forgiven through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

²Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 277.

Now under the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, you could never have a good conscience. It was impossible to have a good conscience before God. Consider Hebrews chapter 9, beginning with verse 6. The writer to the Hebrews is talking about the worship of the tabernacle and he says, concerning all the tabernacle furniture and amenities: “These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section [of the tabernacle] performing their ritual duties. But into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing [which is symbolic for the present age]. According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation” (ESV). What is this saying? It is saying that the Jew under the old covenant could certainly hope that the offerings were, in some way efficacious, in some way helpful, in some way pleasing to God. But he could never have the kind of clear conscience that you and I have when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ on the basis of 1 John 1:9, which says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (ESV).

Why is God just to do that? Why is God just to cleanse you from all unrighteousness and forgive your sins when He is a God who will by no means clear the guilty? The reason is that He presented Jesus Christ as a substitute sinner. And He by no means cleared Him. He laid on Him the transgressions of us all. And it

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sola fide Latin for “by faith alone;” the Protestant theological maxim encapsulating the biblical truth that believers are justified before God by faith in Christ *not* by works.

– John 5:46–

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me” (NASB).

sola gratia Latin for “by grace alone;” the Protestant axiom which concisely captures the truth that God’s unmerited favor (not man’s will or effort) *alone* initiates, secures, & applies salvation to His elect.

(Baptism: NC Pledge Continued from Page 11)

is unjust for him to punish the same sin twice, first in the person of our Lord and then in us! So if we have already been punished in our representative and our life is hidden with Christ in God, then God (I say it reverently) *must* forgive us (that's His rule, not ours). He must forgive us. He can not do anything other than forgive us because it is *just* to forgive us of our sins and and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness; you can rise from prayer to God confessing your sins saying, "There is no condemnation for me. I am in Christ Jesus, and I have a clear conscience before my God!"

The writer to Hebrews goes on to say in verse 11, "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh," [and that is what the writer has just said, that all these things are external sorts of cleansing] "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (ESV). Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. The way we are tempted to handle our conscience, of course, is to do dead works. That's the way our Catholic friends handle their conscience. They find out what dead works to do, and they do those dead works. And that is the way, so often, we behave when we have sinned. All of

a sudden we think we have to do things to make up for that. But all of those things that we do can never atone. "Thou must save and Thou alone." What we have to do is keep coming back constantly to the cross, to the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from all sin, and understand that it is his blood that purges our conscience.

So, let me just ask you, how is your conscience? Can you actually say, "Jesus died for my sins, for every wicked thing I have ever done, said or thought – and every wicked thing that I will ever think, say or do? My salvation is in Christ alone. My righteousness is His imputed righteousness to me. He is my Lord. I am in Him. And therefore God pronounces me righteous all the time. God has not ceased to pronounce me righteous even when I have sinned since my conversion!" Do you believe that? That is the gospel, brothers



and sisters! It is the most amazing thing in the world! When you sin, you must repent of it and confess, but you plead an atonement that has already been made. And you can say, "I have repented. I have come back to the Lord. I have confessed my sin to Him. And now He forgives me and my conscience is clear."

So Peter is saying in our text today in 1 Peter 3 that baptism does not save in any sense when it is a mere external washing. All you do is remove dirt from the body! You don't go into the baptistery just to get clean. Something inside has to have happened. Something in your nature has to have changed. The only true baptism is one that comes from a good conscience. And here is the question. Where do you and I get a good conscience towards God when we are dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to

the prince of the power of the air, which is what we were before we became Christians? How can you and I possibly get a good conscience toward God? The Bible describes the thoughts and intentions of men's hearts as only evil continually. How can such people get a good conscience toward God? The apostle Paul said, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are foolishness to him" (1 Cor. 2:14, author's translation) Where is that man going to get a good conscience towards God?

Clearly, the cleansing of the conscience must be done by the blood of Christ received in faith and repentance. And faith and repentance can only come from a regenerate heart, the heart of one who has been born again by the Holy Spirit. And all these blessings were procured for the people of God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that's Peter's phrase in verse 21. He says that this baptism saves "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God" (ESV). It says in Romans 4:25 that Jesus "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (ESV). That is saying that the reason He was raised from the dead is because your acquittal was accomplished. Your justification was ready to be applied to you. He was raised because your justification had been achieved in His atonement. Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. He couldn't stay dead because it was impossible for death to hold Him. He was without sin. He died as a substitute for others. And so He was raised from the dead, and that resurrection demonstrates that the atonement succeeded, that it was for others and not for Himself. God was declaring Jesus to be the Son of God with power!

Now when you were raised in Him, Paul says in Ephesians 2 that you have

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coram Deo: Latin for "in the Presence of God;" the Protestant theological maxim which summarizes the biblical truth that a believer's life is to glorify and honor God in *all* things and at *all* times.

VISIT THE
PROVIDENCE THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY
FACEBOOK PAGE.

ad fontes: Latin for "to the sources;" a phrase originating from Renaissance humanism, which the Protestant Reformers harnessed to convey the idea of studying God's Word in its original languages.

(Baptism: NC Pledge Continued from Page 12)

been raised together with Him, all the way up to the heavenly places. So intimate is the connection between Jesus' death and God's regarding you as having died, and between Jesus' resurrection and God's regarding you as having been raised that Paul can say, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (NKJ). But the resurrection proves that you who believe are *not* in your sins. You are now new creatures. Your consciences are cleansed. You are children of God. You are saved. You are members of the new covenant. You have God's law written in your heart. You know the Lord from the least of you to the greatest. And your sins are forgiven!

None of these things come through baptism. Baptism simply pictures how you receive these blessings through the union with Christ. When we are baptized by immersion, we are showing forth the death of the believer to his former life, as one united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Baptism is a death, a burial and a resurrection enacted. So, what happens is that the candidate is put into the water and there is the death. And then there is a split-second when you don't see the candidate any more, and the burial is pictured, showing that the old man, the man in Adam, has passed away. And then comes the resurrection as the person emerges, confessing by that action that he or she is a new creature in Christ, united to him in his death, burial and resurrection. Now, union with Christ is accomplished, vitally, in time, at conversion, before the baptism takes place. The baptism just pictures it. The baptism displays it, just as the Lord's Supper, again, displays the death of Jesus.

Why then does Peter say that baptism saves you? You know perfectly well that baptism does not save you. "Not any works of righteousness which [you] have

done, but according to His mercy God saved [you], by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). *Regeneration is the washing that saves you, but not baptism.* So, how can Peter say, "Baptism, which corresponds to Noah's family being saved, now saves" (ESV)? It might help to know the literal translation of what he wrote: "there is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism." I think the key to understanding what he's saying is to concentrate on that word "antitype." That word means that he's making a parallel statement to the description of Noah's family in the ark in the time of the judgment by the flood. In other words, the only sense in which baptism saves us is simply as an analogy to that other rescue, when the family was rescued by God from destruction. A type in Scripture is a pattern or example. An antitype is a corresponding pattern or example. So the King James translation is pretty good here. It calls baptism "the like figure." The like figure of what? The like figure of two things, actually. The like figure not only of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, but also the like figure of the ark as the ark was inundated in the waters of judgment. Those waters were dangerous, they represented the judgment of God, and yet the ark and its passengers were

“Regeneration is the washing that saves you...not baptism.”

delivered. And so what Peter is simply saying here is in terms of an analogy or an example. Baptism is also a kind deliverance. It "saves" only in its analogy as an antitype with the waters of Noah's ark.

The person with the good conscience is already saved when he or she is baptized, or else the good conscience wouldn't be there! And this text, which seems to play right into the hands of those who believe and preach baptismal regeneration, is actually one of the worst enemies of those who preach that doctrine. Why? Because anyone who preaches baptismal regeneration is preaching, in some way or another, the *need* for such regeneration. In other words, the sinner needs to be born again. Whether it's those who baptize babies and then proclaim them to be Christians; or whether it's folks in the Churches of Christ who believe that grace is imparted in the baptismal waters and that's when regeneration happens – either way you have a right to go to such people and say, "Wait a minute! Scriptural baptism is the pledge of a good conscience. How did your sinful baby get a good conscience? Or how did your sinful candidate for baptism get a good conscience? How could they possibly have a good conscience before they're baptized if baptism supposedly *gives* them the good conscience?" So, don't be alarmed because Peter just tosses off this remark that "baptism saves us." Don't be afraid to go here with a proponent of baptismal regeneration, because the text is teaching exactly the opposite.

Now, we've seen that the good conscience only can apply to those whose consciences have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. That means believers. And so, let's ask, or verify, that believer's baptism or 'baptism of the new covenant' is what Peter knew and experienced. Consider the words of our Lord in the Great Commission. Peter was there when Jesus gave the words, and you know them well, they are at the end of Matthew in Matthew 28:18. Jesus starts by saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." He is boldly proclaiming His Kingship, His Lordship, and He has

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solo cruce: Latin for "by the cross alone;" the Protestant theological maxim which encapsulates the biblical truth that salvation is *only* found in Christ's penal substitutionary death on the cross.

– Matthew 5:17 –

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (NASB).

solo evangelio: Latin for "by the gospel alone;" the Protestant axiom that concisely conveys that the Gospel *alone* is the power of God unto salvation and that it is the duty & honor of every believer to share the Gospel in life, word, and deed.

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for his servants. He says in verse 19, "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 behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He commanded that disciples are who should be baptized. That really should settle this issue. He did not say anything about baptizing them *and* their seed, their children.

Now reformed Christians who baptize children agree that there is no direct command to baptize the children of believers. But, they say, there is no command that forbids it either. I beg to differ. Can we baptize adult *unbelievers*? There is no command directly forbidding it, is there? No, not in terms of "Thou shalt not." But, because of the positive command about who should be baptized, the negative of that command must be assumed. That means that there *is* a command that forbids you to baptize an adult unbeliever. It's this one. It forbids it. It says, "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them [i.e. the disciples]" (ESV). You can't be baptized until you are a disciple, by virtue of the fact that this defines who is to be baptized. Therefore, those who are not defined here should be understood to be excluded. When Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church" (NIV), do you say, "Well, sure, I'm supposed to do that, but that doesn't prevent me from loving another woman as Christ loved the church, does it?" And when he says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands" (NIV), is that saying that the wife is supposed to submit herself to every man? No, of course not. Just because there is not an explicit text forbidding candidates for baptism does not mean that we cannot conclude from the specific candidates in the commandment who is *not* supposed

to be a candidate. If the command had *not* meant "these and no other," Jesus would have said so.

So now consider Peter's own experiences with baptism. Look at Penetcost in Acts 2:34-37. There he is preaching and, all of a sudden, his sermon is virtually interrupted. They heard this, they were cut to the heart. They said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (NIV). The presupposition is *epi*, which means "upon." It is saying that this command is based on the authority of Jesus. It's not denying the Trinity, or conflicting with Jesus' words in the Great Commission. Moreover, it says, "For the remission of sins." The word, "for" is *eis*, which

"He [i.e. Christ] commanded that disciples are who should be baptized. That really should settle this issue. He did not say anything about baptizing them and their seed, their children."

means "in reference to." So when Peter says, "Be baptized...for the remission of sins" (NKJ), he's saying, "for the remission of sins which you will have already received before your baptism, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (NKJ). Our paedobaptist friends love to quote, "For the promise is to you and to your children" (NKJ). But they don't quote the rest of it: "to all who are *afar off*, as many as the Lord our God will *call*" (NKJ). That describes

who the proper subjects of baptism are. It's clear that they are those whom the Lord calls effectually, Jews and Gentiles, who will give evidence of their calling in faith and repentance, and who are to be baptized. The 'children' to whom this promise is made will need to personally fulfill the conditions of faith and repentance in response to their calling from God. The graciousness of the promise lies in the fact that the children and subsequent generations from all over the world will have the opportunity to hear, repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus, and be baptized as believers.

You see the same thing in Cornelius' house, where Peter had the privilege of speaking the gospel to the Gentiles and seeing them saved. In Acts 10:44 we read, "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," (those are the Jews) "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?' (NKJ). That is baptism in a nutshell. One verse, verse 47. All those who have God's law in their hearts. All those who know the Lord. All those whose sins are forgiven.

This was not only Peter's experience. It was Philip's experience in Samaria and with the Ethiopian eunuch. It was Paul's experience. It's the pattern in the book of Acts.

Now so far, all of our paedobaptist brothers and sisters will agree with what I've said. They're not going to argue with the book of Acts. No doubt they argue with my contention that infant baptism is specifically forbidden by virtue of the fact

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biblical theology: a theological approach that seeks to determine the theological teaching and distinctives of the individual biblical authors and understand them in light of the progressive revelation of God's Word.

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systematic theology: a theological approach that seeks to distill and systematize into a consistent, logical framework all that the entire canon of Scripture teaches on any particular theological subject or topic.

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that Jesus says it is for disciples. But they certainly have the right to ask this: what about the household baptisms in the book of Acts? Let us take the most famous example in Acts 16. Start with verse 31, when Paul said to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (NKJ). What's he saying there? Is he saying that all your household is going to be saved because of your belief? No. He would never say that. The Bible doesn't teach that. He is simply saying, "you and your household can be saved and will be saved on the same condition, that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And anybody in your household who believes on Jesus will also be saved." Verse 32 says, "Then they spoke the word of God to him and all who were in the house" (NKJ). So everybody in the household heard the word of God. "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all of his family were baptized" (NKJ). "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" (NKJ). There is no evidence here that there were any infants present. No infants are mentioned. But we may be sure of one thing: if any infants were present they heard the word of God, they believed the word of God, and were baptized and rejoiced with their father! The other household baptisms I will not go into. They're mentioned in Acts 16:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:16. And, again, no infants are mentioned. Arguments for their presence are arguments from a *deafening* silence.

But now here is the difficult issue. Someone else may ask, "What about the connection between circumcision as the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament and baptism as the sign of the new covenant. Surely as infants once were

circumcised under the Abrahamic covenant and subsequent covenants, they should be baptized in the new covenant." This is the most formidable argument for infant baptism, and the one that has been so enticing over the years to people learning about the Reformed faith, to people who read Calvin, the Puritans and the Westminster Confession of the Faith.

The first point that must be made is that the relationship of circumcision to baptism is based on a third thing. And that thing is what circumcision points to – regeneration. Circumcision is fulfilled in regeneration. Circumcision was a sign given to Abraham. It's called a sign and a seal. And it was given not only to



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Abraham, but also to his seed after him. It was symbolic of cleansing. But in God's commands to Israel about circumcision of the heart we see what circumcision of the body typified. Deuteronomy 10:16 says, "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (NKJ). The command is, "Make your heart toward Me match your body." Jeremiah 4:4 says essentially the same thing.

Is there a connection between circumcision and baptism, so that the latter has replaced the former, as most of the Reformed churches claim? There is a relationship, but it is *not* one of replacement.

Again, what relationship there is comes through the reality that both things are signifying, which is regeneration. Let us go to the classic "proof text," Colossians 2:11 and 12, "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" (NKJ) – that means the circumcision that is of the Spirit, of the heart. "By putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ" (NKJ). Now what that is saying is that Jesus has circumcised the heart of every single one of us in the new covenant. And then Paul goes on to say you are "buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (NKJ). So what's the relationship? Simply this: what circumcision pointed *toward*, baptism points *back to*. But baptism never points toward it. Insofar as circumcision pointed toward the fulfillment of regeneration, baptism is done after regeneration has occurred. The heart circumcised by Christ, the heart that now knows the Lord, his law and his forgiveness, the new covenant heart is now the one which submits to baptism.

The second thing to say about the circumcision/baptism argument is that there is not the remotest connection made between the rituals anywhere in the Bible. In other words, yes, Colossians speaks of circumcision of the heart and baptism; but no text brings together physical circumcision and baptism. There's not the remotest connection made between the two rituals anywhere in the Bible. Nobody ever teaches that baptism answers to circumcision and *they could have*. Paul had the perfect opportunity when he wrote to the Galatians who were being troubled by Judaizers who said, "Unless you have been circumcised you cannot be saved." If Paul had believed the classic Covenant Theology of most Reformed churches, he could have

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solo Christo: Latin for "by Christ alone;" the Protestant axiom that concisely conveys the biblical truth that salvation is found *only* in the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole mediator between God and man.

– John 5:39 –

"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (NASB).

soli Deo gloria: Latin for "to God alone be the glory;" the Protestant theological maxim which denotes that everything that man does should be done for the express purpose of bringing glory to God *not* himself.

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simply written, "Dear foolish Galatians, you don't understand. Circumcision has been fulfilled in baptism. Sincerely, Paul." Furthermore the same issue necessitated calling the council at Jerusalem. When it convened, where were the covenant theologians to say, "Wait a minute. Circumcision has been fulfilled by baptism. Meeting adjourned?" The fact is, *the Bible does not teach this*. It is a tradition of men. It is a man-made tradition drawn from "good and necessary deductions," from logic, from sentiment even, but not from the pages of Scripture. "To the law and to the testimony!" If they do not speak according to this word, there may be light in them on many other subjects on which we agree, but there is no light in them on this one.

The third thing to say is that in the Abrahamic and subsequent covenants, you became part of the people of God by birth. All you had to do was be born! Under the new covenant how do you become part of the people of God? By being born *again*! It's just this simple. Circumcision was for the born; baptism is for the born again. Whose is the last birth recorded in the Bible? To whom do the last genealogies in the Bible belong? We don't have any more after those of Jesus. Our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Seed to whom the Abrahamic promises were made has come. And those who are united to that Seed, by faith, receive the blessings promised to Abraham. "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29, NKJ), and "those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Gal. 3:9, NKJ). It's no longer by birth. Paul wrote, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." (Gal. 6:15, NKJ).

The fourth thing to say about the circumcision/baptism argument is that children of believers are holy, in the sense

of "set apart," without being baptized as infants. They are already holy in that sense, and there is nothing that you can do about it! They may wind up in hell but their judgment will likely be more severe because they were holy! They were simply born to at least one believer and that alone sufficed to set them apart. 1 Corinthians 7:14 says, "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy" (NKJ). Paul is clearly teaching that children of believers have special privileges; that they are set apart from this sinful world; that they have the great opportunities that come from being connected to a Christian parent. However, the same

THE CUP OF THE LORD'S TABLE



THE SIGN OF THE NEW COVENANT

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blessings are true of an unbelieving husband. We wouldn't baptize the unbelieving husband because he's holy would we? And yet he's holy too! We would say he's got to repent and believe. But the child is supposedly holy and therefore is supposed to be baptized, when baptism is not even mentioned in the passage! They already have the blessing. There's nothing that they would receive in baptism that they don't already have. They're already holy.

The fifth thing to say is something *not* to say. Don't say this: that baptism is the sign of the new covenant! While my thesis is that baptism is the pledge of membership in the new covenant, it is

not the *sign* of the new covenant. If you say that it is, you open yourself up to the brilliant, but unscriptural comparisons between circumcision and baptism. If you want to get twisted into a doctrinal pretzel, allow the point to one of our paedobaptist brothers or sisters that yes, baptism is the sign of the covenant. Their nostrils will flare. Their eyes will flash. And they'll bring you in to the discussion of the analogy of baptism and circumcision. My point is this: we have got to deprogram ourselves from a theological covenant that is not mentioned in Scripture and a baptism that is not a sign of that covenant, not even, strictly speaking, the sign of the *new* covenant. It's just not called that, ever. What is the sign of the new covenant? Jesus told us. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20, NKJ). And isn't it fitting that before one can partake of that sign he/she must *examine* himself? That is something infants cannot do. The very sign of the new covenant insists that the requirements of membership have been fulfilled: God's law in the heart, knowing God without being taught, and sins completely forgiven. Because infants by nature cannot enjoy these blessings apart from a demonstrable work of grace, they are not members of the new covenant. They are not proper subjects to make its *pledge* (baptism) or receive its *sign* (communion). I say, as I said, at the beginning, it is a question of who is *in* the covenant.

Infant baptism is, therefore, not found in Scripture. I have often wished that it were. I have often wished sometimes, as Spurgeon himself wished, that we Baptists could get away from the stigma of being odd and different and separate from the majority of the church in the world. *But infant baptism is not found in Scripture*. And not only is it not found in Scripture and therefore we cannot do it, it seriously distorts the sacrament of baptism because it cannot represent union with Christ. Nor can it be

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Israel: the temporary geo-political entity, comprised of both believing & unbelieving ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the people of God established by the old covenant enacted at Mount Sinai.

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the Church: spiritual body of Christ, comprised of both believing Jews & believing Gentiles, that was first formed in history when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost; the people of God established by the new covenant secured & ratified by Christ Jesus.

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the pledge of a good conscience toward God received by repentance and faith. And not only that, it is a false ritual that, in many cases, prevents the exercise of the true one. Pastors of Christians who received infant baptism will sometimes deny Scriptural believer's baptism to those same members once they are truly converted. Churches who practice paedobaptism, will, ironically, practice proper baptism to adult proselytes who ask for it, but deny it to their own lifelong members when they themselves are born again! Surely this is the major area that the Reformers refused to reform. They would not bring infant baptism out of Catholicism except so far as to say that it doesn't regenerate. Surely here is where the reformation of the church must continue, brothers and sisters.

My last point is a brief one: baptism rightly administered upon evidence of new covenant blessings has many benefits. This has great practical application for the church. First, of course, those who have been baptized at infancy believe, because they have been taught, that they don't need it, that it doesn't need to happen once they personally believe on Jesus. The second thing is that so many people are taught that salvation is by grace through faith and therefore they conclude that they don't need to do the actual act of obedience of being baptized. So it's neglected by those who perhaps fear the doctrine of baptism too much!

But here are the blessings that it brings to the church, the things we need to see in our day and age. First, it affirms to the one getting baptized his union with Christ. He says, in His baptism, "I'm united to Jesus. I died with Him. I was buried with Him. I'm raised with Him. I was there when they crucified my Lord." Second, it pictures the gospel to the congregation, encouraging them and strengthening their faith. Third, it publicly marks out, as much as anything

solo Spiritus Latin for "by the Spirit alone;" a theological maxim summarizing the theological truth that the Spirit alone illuminates believers to truly understand God's Word & empowers believers to live godly lives in Christ Jesus.

can, the redeemed people of God, and therefore proclaims them to be the church. And it prevents, as much as anything can, the confusion between real and false Christians, the growth of wheat and tares together that characterizes Christendom, particularly in those countries where infant baptism is universally practiced. Lastly, it encourages true conversions. Why? Because it is a fearful thing to come to the water. It is a fearful thing to come to the baptistery. It's a humbling thing to come and have this done in the presence of your new family. It encourages true conversions and it guards the Lord's Supper from those who are disobedient and who refuse to follow the Lord's example and command.

– BAPTISM – NEW COVENANT PLEDGE OF MEMBERSHIP

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"...baptism rightly administered upon evidence of new covenant blessings has many benefits. This has great practical application for the church."

Hebrews 10:19 is an exhortation to believers and it is wonderful. It's an exhortation to come together into the very throne room of God, into the presence of our heavenly Father, with the way paved for us by our merciful High Priest. It's an invitation to do the most wonderful thing that you can do as a Christian, to draw nigh to God. And I want to say that this passage alone should make the case that the subject of baptism is in need of reformation. Because it's a call to experience a blessing that only those who have been

scripturally baptized can fully enter. It is frankly hard for me to see how anyone who has only been baptized as an infant can feel as though he meets the requirement for this blessing. This may seem like a hard saying, but it is based on the word of God.

I have seen so often the beginning of this blessing. Having baptized so many people in my life, I wouldn't trade anything for the sight of the joy of those candidates when they come out of the water. To see their joy, to see their happiness, to see the glow that is on their faces is a wonderful experience. Something sublime happens as they obey the Lord. They are so happy after their baptism. And so, as I say, this is a call to experience a blessing that only those who have been scripturally baptized can fully enter. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He opened for us, through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our *bodies washed with pure water*" (ESV).

FINIS.

Editor's Note: On November 29, 2011, the Lord called home his devoted servants, Jackson Boyett (the author of this article) and his wife Barbara. Their lives were a sure testimony of the grace and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Soli Deo Gloria.*



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– Jeremiah 31:31 –

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (NASB).

the Noahic Covenant the covenant whereby God covenantally promised to Noah, his descendants, and all living creatures that he would *never* again destroy the whole earth by means of a flood; the sign of this covenant is the rainbow.

The Doctrine of Salvation

- Part 1 -

by William W. Sasser¹

The longest word in any language is *eternity*; the darkest and most dreadful word is *hell*; the sweetest word is *Christ*; but the greatest word is *salvation*. The writer to the Hebrews asked, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so GREAT salvation" (Heb. 2:3)?² The Greek word translated "salvation," *soteria*, denotes deliverance or preservation. It is commonly used when referring to deliverance from sin. This is what is intended by the question, "What must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:30)? However, as we shall see, salvation is *much more* than deliverance only. It includes what our great God did in eternity past; what He has done in time; what He has done with us; what He shall do with us in the future, and what shall be done in the eternal future.

Salvation is in, by, and through Christ. As Peter said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is why we preach the gospel. "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

The Cause of Salvation

The cause of salvation may be expressed in one word: God! Salvation was purposed by the Almighty God before the creation of the world, executed and sustained in time, and shall be consummated in eternity. As someone has said,

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²All Scripture citations are from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise indicated.

"God thought it, wrought it, bought it, and sought it." That is, it was God who conceived of salvation. It was God who worked out how salvation would actually be brought to pass. It was God who purchased salvation, in a manner consistent with His own holy and perfect law and justice. And, it was God who sought out, called and applied salvation to all who are the recipients of it. As David said concerning the salvation of Israel, "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor unto them" (Psa. 44:3). And, as the Lord said in Isaiah, "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me" (Isa. 63:5).

Make no mistake here, my dear friend, salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9)! If ever we find ourselves as helpless as was Jonah, when he was in the belly of the great fish, we too shall confess, "*salvation is of the Lord!*"

The Scope of Salvation

The word "salvation," *soteria* in the Greek, means, "deliverance, safety, or preservation." But the *doctrine* of salvation encompasses all time and eternity, and utilizes the wisdom and power of all three Persons of the Godhead. That is, salvation had its beginning in eternity past, and extends into eternity future. As such, the doctrine of salvation includes the actions taken by all the Persons of the Godhead relative to securing a people for the glory of God: namely, election by the Father, the Suretyship of the Son, and the calling, regenerating, sealing and comforting work of the Holy Spirit.

The salvation of God's people was no afterthought. It was purposed and planned before the foundation of the world in every detail, even to the record

ing of the names of all who would be saved in time (Rev. 17:8; Luke 10:20). My friend, God leaves nothing regarding His glory to chance, and the glory of God is bound up in the salvation of His people. Will you not come to Christ in faith, and partake of this GREAT salvation? "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Regeneration: A Supernatural Act

Our English word, *regeneration*, is derived from a Latin word which means "born again, born a second time," or "generated again." In Titus 3:5 we are told that one is saved "by the washing of regeneration." The Greek word translated "regeneration," is *palingenias*, from *palin*, meaning "again," and *genesis*, meaning "birth." In John 3:7 the same truth is presented, though in slightly different language: "ye must be born again" is literally *born (gennaō) from above (anōthen)*. Again, in Ephesians 2:1, Paul declares to the believers in the church at Ephesus that they had been "dead in trespasses and sins," but that God had quickened, i.e., made them alive (*zōopoieō*). Finally, 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that everyone who is in Christ is a new creature, literally, "a new creation." From such verses one can understand that regeneration is a supernatural act of God, whereby He gives spiritual life to one who is absolutely without it, that is, who is spiritually dead.

Regeneration & Spiritual Death

According to the Scriptures, the first man, Adam, was told that disobedience to the express command of God would result in a state of death (Gen. 2:15-17). We know from the record that, although Adam did disobey, he lived for many years before his body died (Gen. 5:5). But why did his body die? His body died because the very instant he disobeyed

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the Abrahamic Covenant: the royal grant covenant outlined in Genesis 12, 15, 17 in which God covenantally promised to Abraham *a seed, a nation, and a land*; these covenant promises were fulfilled in the Old Testament types of Isaac, the nation of Israel, and the land of Canaan; this covenant is ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant via the antitypes of Christ (& His elect), the Church, and the new heavens & new earth.

(Doctrine of Salvation Continued from Page 18)

God he died spiritually....Adam's spiritual death evidenced itself in that he became afraid of God, and sought to hide from Him (Gen. 3:8-10). God's remedy for spiritual death is regeneration. By His power the Spirit of God renews, or regenerates, the "old man," thus making him a "new man" (Rom.6:6; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10). Such a person is said to be a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), born again (John 3:3,7), or spiritually alive (Eph. 2:1). ***It is only the regenerated person who possesses salvation.***

Regeneration & the Spirit

To be regenerated is to be made alive, to be born again, to be made a new creation, to be spiritually resurrected from the dead. Regeneration is the work of the Spirit alone. It cannot be produced by any act of man, whether that act is moral or religious (Titus 3:5). It cannot be executed, caused, or in any way brought about by the will of man, the flesh of man, or the procreative powers of man. It can only be effected only by the Sovereign Spirit of God (John 1:12-13).

Our Lord said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7), not "Ye must born yourself again." Such language indicates that the one who is regenerated is passive in the matter, not active. That is, the one who is regenerated does not in any way participate in the regeneration process. Rather, he or she is acted upon by another, namely the Spirit of God. Certainly no one would argue that they effected their natural birth, and only pride, or ignorance – or both – causes men to usurp the work of the Spirit in the new birth.

Repentance, Faith & Regeneration

When the writers of Scripture speak of "being saved," they are usually emphasizing the necessity of faith and

repentance, two gifts of the Spirit which are experienced and exercised by the one being saved. It is God who does the saving, but it is the individual being saved who is doing the repenting and believing. But when the Word of God speaks of "being born again," the emphasis is on the activity and work of the Spirit alone. In this latter case, it is God only who is acting, not the one being born again. One who is regenerated by the Spirit has salvation, and one who has salvation repents and believes. But it is regeneration which comes first, not faith and repentance. This is necessarily so because, before regeneration, one is dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1), and we all know that dead persons cannot perform spiritual acts.

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

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The Necessity of Regeneration

Our Lord Jesus Christ told Nicodemus, "Ye ***must*** be born again" (John 3:7). The fact emphasized is the absolute ***necessity*** of regeneration for all who would enter heaven; the new birth is not optional: "Ye ***must*** be born again!" Regeneration is a ***universal*** necessity. All whose hope is salvation must be born again. The word translated "Ye" is plural. That is, our Lord was not speaking to Nicodemus only, but to all who are in the same spiritual condition as Nicodemus. Secondly, regeneration is a ***critical*** necessity: "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Thirdly, regeneration is a ***moral*** necessity. The reason men are immoral is because they are separated from the life of God, which life is one of righteousness and holiness. By the New Birth, the Spirit of God changes an individual by taking up residence. That is, the bodies, souls, and minds of regenerated persons

become the temple of the Lord (2 Cor. 6:16). Having the Holy Spirit, one is drawn toward holiness, righteousness and right conduct. Fourthly, regeneration is a ***mental*** necessity. Sin has darkened the mind, causing men to become vain in their imaginations, and unable to understand the things which are spiritual (Rom. 1:21; Eph.1:17-18). Because of sin's devastating effect upon the mind and heart, men have become children of wrath, seeking only to follow and fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Eph. 2:1-3). In fact, we are said to be dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Now the only way a dead person could serve God is if he or she were made alive, which is precisely what the New Birth accomplishes. He that is dead in sin is dead toward God. However, he that is regenerated, or born from above, is made alive to God. He is thus able to know God's will, to do God's His will, and to enter His kingdom by faith.

The Cause of Regeneration & Salvation

Any person who is seeking salvation knows the importance of regeneration; *Ye must be born again* does not express an option, but an absolute necessity. But what is the cause of salvation? What is the basis without which there could be no salvation? At this point many become confused. Let me suggest four causes of salvation.

The ***efficacious*** cause of salvation is the will of God. Had God not willed to save a people, salvation would not be possible. Thus James declares, "of His own will begat He us" (Jas. 1:18). Paul, expressing the same truth from the opposite perspective, says, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

The ***meritorious*** cause of salvation is the blood of Christ. The Bible is clear that *without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin* (Heb. 9:22). That is, God

(Continued on Page 20)

the Davidic Covenant the royal grant covenant outlined in 2 Samuel 7 in which God covenantally promised to David *a son, a throne, a kingdom, and a temple*; these covenant promises were fulfilled in the Old Testament type of Solomon who sat upon David's throne over Israel and built God's temple in Jerusalem; this covenant is ultimately fulfilled in the New Covenant via the antitype of Jesus Christ (David's greater son) who presently sits upon God the Father's throne over His everlasting kingdom and built God's *true* temples (i.e. His resurrected body, the Church, and the individual believer).

– Ezekiel 36:27 –

"And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*" (NASB).

(Doctrine of Salvation Continued from Page 19)

saves no one whose sins are not paid for, because sin not paid for cannot be justly put away. God has said that He will "by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. 34:7). Jesus Christ paid for sin through His death at Calvary. Thus, the shedding of His blood is the meritorious cause of salvation.

The **agential** cause of salvation is the Holy Spirit. That is, the Holy Spirit, by His regenerating work, is the agent of salvation. "Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 1:13; 3:5 6:63).

The **instrumental** cause of salvation is the Word of God. We are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Pet.1:23). It is the written Word of God which the Spirit uses in salvation, not the word of men using logic and psychology (Psa. 33:4-9; Gen. 1:6-7; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5).

Substitutes for Regeneration

Although our Lord has said, "*Ye must be born again,*" nevertheless men and devils have deceived many by substituting something else for regeneration. Of course, such salvation is spurious, that is, false, phony, or counterfeit. There are many common substitutes of regeneration. We shall consider some of them.

Good works are often substituted for regeneration. Although every child of God does good works, yet no one is saved by them. Paul wrote, in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Could anything be clearer? We are not saved by works but by grace. Even our faith is a gift of God. If we were saved by works, we could boast. Paul

argues, however, that since no one can boast before God, all who are saved cannot have been saved by works. Again, in Titus 3:5, it is written, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The basis of our salvation is pure, sovereign mercy. The means by which this salvation is given, or applied, is regeneration, which is solely the work of the Holy Spirit and not the work of the one who is regenerated.

Another common substitute for regeneration is **reformation**. That is, many people "turn over a new leaf" to find the favor of God. They have somehow swallowed the idea that change is synonymous with the new birth. It is true that the new birth effects radical change, but it is not true that changing one's conduct effects the new birth. Being saved is not a matter of one making up one's mind "to become a Christian," rather, salvation results from a mighty work of God **within** an individual, which causes change. The acts of faith and repentance are beyond natural human ability. They are gifts of God (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 11:18). Thus, savingly believing on Jesus Christ is not a matter of the human will, but a matter of the heart: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom.10:9). Here is just the problem. How can the natural man, i.e., the unregenerate person, believe with the heart, when, according to the Bible, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9)? How can the natural mind love Him against whom it is enmity, for, again, the Bible declares that, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). **Answer:** God must change the heart. This is precisely what happens in the new birth. As our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The new birth will result

in reformation, but reformation cannot cause the new birth, and must not be substituted for it.

It is error to substitute **church membership** for regeneration, fatal error. But in fact, rated on a scale of one to ten, church membership is perhaps the most common substitute of all. Satan is working full time to slip men and women imitations and counterfeits of the new birth, and in this area he has been very successful. Added to this demonic deception is the natural depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart. Many believe they are children of God because of what they have done, and because of what they have professed. But admission into the local church must not be equated with admission into the kingdom of Christ. "*Ye must be born again!*"

Some of the most fearful words recorded in scripture, are the words our Lord will utter to many who will have done many things in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. No doubt, many of them will be church members. Many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23). My church member friend, as Thomas Boston said, "if we art not born again, all our outward reformation is naught. We have shut the door, but the thief is still in the house."

Another substitute for regeneration is **doing the best one can**. Often in a visitation the minister is informed, "Preacher, I do the best I can, and that is all God requires of anyone." One may be surprised how widespread this thinking may be. Those individuals with this contention are often confronted with a searching question such as, "*Can you honestly say that you have done the best*

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- Luke 24:27 -

"And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (NASB).

circumcision: the sign of the covenant which Yahweh forged with Abraham; all Israelite males were to be physically circumcised on the eighth day after being born; any Israelite male who was not physically circumcised was cut off from the people of Israel; the New Testament Scriptures teach that circumcision was given as "a seal of the righteousness of the faith" that Abraham had; the New Testament parallel of Old Testament circumcision is *circumcision of the heart* (i.e. regeneration), not water baptism.

(Doctrine of Salvation Continued from Page 20)

you can do?" Of course, in reality, no one does the best that he or she can do. If there is any room for improvement, at any time, now or in the future, such an one is only bearing witness against himself, viz., that he or she has not done the best he can do.

The fact of the matter is, salvation is not a result of man's efforts, even if he has done his very best. Besides, the Bible declares, "verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5). And the Lord Jesus taught His disciples, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

Think about it: if one could save himself by doing his best, would the Father have sent His Son into the world to save us? Why should Christ take flesh in order to suffer if we can save ourselves? My friend, God does not require the best you can do, for the best you and I can do is fall short of what is required - ABSOLUTE PERFECTION (Rom. 3:9-23). Rather, God requires the best that HE can do. It took the doing and dying of God to save us. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, He did all that God required. Trust Him!

Another substitute for regeneration is *sincerity*. Many are the people who say "if one is just sincere, this is all that matters." Of course this is not only poor reasoning, and indicates great ignorance of the character and demands of a holy God, but it is also untrue and dangerous. It is untrue because sincerity is *not* all that matters, it is not even the primary thing that matters, and it is dangerous because if sincerity is all that one has, one has nothing with which to stand acceptably before the Lord. The Scriptures teach that God requires a second birth of all who would enter heaven.

Suppose that one picked up a coca-cola bottle and drank the contents, sincerely believing that he or she was drinking coke. But suppose that, instead of coke, the bottle contained poison. Would sincerity nullify the poison? Would sincerity prevent suffering and death? Of course not, no more than sincerity will nullify the poisonous effects of sin and make one pleasing to God. Nicodemus was a sincere man, but he was told, "*Ye must be born again!*" Saul of Tarsus was so sincere that he killed people for his faith, yet he had no salvation because he did not know Christ, he was not born again. Every Christian is sincere, but sincerity does not make one a Christian. Do not make the mistake, my reader, of substituting your sincerity for regeneration.

Yet another substitute for regeneration is *the Golden Rule*. There are many in our society whose salvation is, *if you will do unto your neighbor as you would have your neighbor do unto you, you will certainly be saved and go to heaven*. It is true that our Lord taught His disciples to love their neighbor, but He did not stop there. He said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor *as thyself*" (Matt. 19:19). Further, no where did our Lord teach that all one must do to be saved is to love one's neighbor. The truth of the matter is, that unless, and until, one is given a new nature, i.e., born again, one can really love no one but himself or herself. The only person who has ever loved his neighbor as himself is Jesus Christ.

The weakness of the argument, that keeping the so-called golden rule is all that is necessary to please God, is two-fold: it denies the spiritual inability of man, and it fails to recognize the holiness of God, as manifest by God's law. The law demands not just that one love, but that one love perfectly. The law of God demands perfection perpetually in word, thought, and deed. Any deviation in principle or degree brings condemnation. Such demands, which are fair, righteous,

and just, are too lofty for sinful man.

The fact of the matter is that one must first love God **before** one can love his neighbor. But if one would be saved, let him love and serve God's Son. He is the best neighbor a sinner ever had.

Yet another substitute for regeneration is the **human will**. Really there should be no question about this commonly taught error. The Bible is very clear that all who are born again are born, "*not of blood* [natural descent], *nor of the will of the flesh* [sexual union], *nor of the will of man* [human decision], *but of God*" (John 1:13); and again, "*So then it is not of him that willeth* [human decision], *nor of him that runneth* [human action], *but of God that sheweth mercy* [sovereign grace]." Regeneration is not caused by the human will, but by the divine will: "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth*" (Jas. 1:18). The human will does not cause, contribute to, or control regeneration any more than it caused, contributed to, or controlled natural generation. Our first birth was not dependent upon our will, and neither is the new birth.

According to the Word of God, every individual is born into this world SPIRITUALLY DEAD (Eph. 2:1). Just as one who is physically dead will not respond to any physical stimuli, so one who is spiritually dead will not respond to spiritual stimuli. One who is dead cannot hear, see, think or move. To do so would evidence life. Similarly, one who is dead in trespasses and sins cannot perform any spiritual act. All action **follows** life. First there is life, **then** there is action. Life is imparted in, by, and through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Life manifests itself through the actions of the regenerated one, viz., turning from sin and self [repentance], turning to and trusting in Christ [faith], and a desire to live in a way that is pleasing to Christ [obedience].

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sabbath: the sign of the covenant which Yahweh forged with Israel at Mount Sinai; all Israelites were covenantally bound to rest from all manner of work on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week; in addition to the weekly Sabbath, the Law of Moses also outlined special Sabbaths (associated with certain Jewish feast days), the sabbatical year, and the jubilee year; the New Testament Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the antitype of the Sabbath and that it is in Christ that believers find their true spiritual rest; as a result, Christians are not obligated to keep the Sabbath under the New Covenant.

- John 1:45b -

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (NASB).

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My friends, the thrice Holy God is the cause of our salvation; it is He who has saved us, and not we ourselves. Do not make the fatal mistake of thinking that you caused your own salvation. Rather, look to Christ and give God the glory.

Yet another substitute for regeneration is **conviction**. Many mistake conviction for regeneration. Although conviction is certainly experienced by all who come to Christ, and even by those who are regenerated, it is not to be confused with the new birth. The Bible lists many individuals who were convicted of sin, but never converted to the Savior. Pharaoh said, "I have sinned" (Exod. 9:27), Balaam said, "I have sinned" (Num. 22:34), so also did king Saul, Achan and Judas (1 Sam. 15:24; Josh. 7:20; Matt. 27:4), but there is no evidence that any of them were ever converted.

Sometimes conviction is a result of the work of the conscience. Sometimes conviction is caused by hearing the Word of God, and sometimes one is convicted by the speech of another. But conviction which accompanies salvation is produced by the Holy Spirit. The main differences between these kinds of convictions and the convicting work of the Spirit is two fold. First, Holy Spirit conviction focuses on the fact that **one's sins are against God**. David said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Psa. 51:4). David knew that his problem was with God, not his family or fellow man. Secondly, Holy Spirit conviction brings one to **call upon the Lord for salvation**. The Holy Spirit does not convince one of sin for conviction's sake, but in order to bring one to faith in Christ. Conviction that does not, at some point, result in conversion is not Holy

Spirit conviction, and must not be confused with regeneration. **To do so would be eternally fatal.**

Of all the substitutes for regeneration, perhaps the most common one is **baptism**. All sorts of ideas about the efficacy of baptism exist. Some teach that the water actually washes sins away, although everyone knows that sin is a principle that is within each individual. But how is it possible that an *external substance*, such as water, could wash away an *internal principle*, such as sin? Others think that baptism is a mystical act which places one into the mystical body of Christ, thus effecting salvation. If this were true, however, salvation would not be of grace, but the result of an act carried out by one who is dead in trespasses and sins, or at least effected by the one performing the baptism.

It is not water baptism which puts one into the Christ, but Holy Spirit regeneration. Paul said that salvation is, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

Baptism in water is a profession of faith, and an act of obedience to Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16). It is not an act which creates faith, or which regenerates, or which puts one into Christ. If one is not already in Christ before one is in the water, then water baptism means nothing, for one who is not in Christ cannot confess Christ. In such a case, baptism in water can only be a ritual substituted for regeneration.

The most popular substitute for regeneration is **decisionism**. Most contemporary preaching and teaching appeals to the unbeliever to "make your decision for Christ." This is not only confusing, it is wrong. No where in all of the Bible, Old Testament or New, does any prophet, apostle, disciple, or even Christ Himself, make such an appeal. The truth is that decisionism, or "making a decision for

Christ," is strictly a man-made doctrine which originated with Charles Finney, an evangelist of a century ago.

While it is true that the human will is involved in coming to Christ, it is not true that making a decision puts one into Christ. I could decide to be seven feet tall, but this will not *cause* me to be seven feet tall. Similarly, to decide to be born again does not cause me to be born again. The new birth does not rest upon a decision, neither is it occasioned or controlled by a decision. The truth is, that the new birth is *other* than a decision, and *more* than a decision. If the new birth is a direct work of the Holy Spirit, in which He resurrects one who is dead in sin to new life, the ascent of the mind, or decision of the will, is secondary and not primary. That is, before the giving of life by the Spirit, the will is as dead in sin as the heart, the emotions and the conscience. Just as a dead person cannot will himself/herself to live, neither can one who is spiritually dead will life into himself/herself. Nicodemus willed to seek Christ, but Christ told him, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:3,7). Christ did not tell Nicodemus that if he would make a decision he would be born again. Rather, He told him that the new birth was a result of the work and will of the sovereign Spirit (John 3:8).

According to the Word of God, the Spirit, through the hearing of the taught word, creates faith in the soul by which one believes (Rom. 10:17). As such, faith is not so much a *decision to believe* as it is a calling on the Lord for salvation. To be sure, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13), not "whosoever decides for Jesus."

The Nature of Regeneration

Regeneration is a divine work. Since this is true, it is quite necessarily a

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- Colossians 1:18 -

Christ "is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (NASB).

baptism one of two ordinances instituted by Christ for observance in the Church; New Testament baptism is **not** the sign of the new covenant; water baptism *by immersion* is to be administered **only** to professing believers, since the New Testament clearly teaches (1) that baptism is "the pledge of a good conscience" toward God and (2) that individuals are to be baptized after becoming disciples of Christ; baptism is **not** salvific but symbolizes the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection via Spirit regeneration.

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mysterious work. Being a work of mystery, it cannot be fully understood, either in its nature or extent. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:3,7), but He did not tell him how. Why is this? Could it be because the one who is born again is not active when it happens, but entirely passive? We would not say that one was active in causing one's first birth, would we? Of course not! How, then, can one participate in causing oneself to be "born from above," as the word *anōthen* literally means? But one need not be familiar with pediatrics to understand the passivity of the one who is born again, simply look carefully at the phrase. Does Christ say, "*Ye must born yourself again,*" or does He say, "*Ye must **BE** born again?*" In the first case the subject is active, but in the second case, the subject is acted upon.

So, in the first place, we must understand that it is God who is the cause of the new birth, **not** man. Since it is a birth from heaven, it must necessarily be caused by the Father of Heaven. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). A birth from above must come from above. A spiritual birth must come from the Spirit of God.

In regeneration, an **impartation of life** transpires. This life is ethereal, or heavenly, and spiritual. According to the Apostle Peter, those who are regenerated partake of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Paul says that regeneration creates a "new man," which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ (Col. 3:10); and that if any man be in Christ, he is a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). Regeneration, then, is a direct, miraculous impartation of spiritual life. This new life is not the result of the works of the flesh, but created in the soul of man by the power of God the Spirit. God has given man great knowledge, power and ability,

but man cannot create new life within himself. Regeneration is the work of God alone.

According to the Word of God, man does not possess the moral, physical or spiritual ability to submit unto, or savingly believe on Christ (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14). The reason for this spiritual inability is spiritual death, *i.e.*, man is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). We all agree that one who is dead can do nothing. It is in regeneration that one receives spiritual life, and thus spiritual ability. Thus, life precedes repentance and faith. Faith does not produce life, but life gives birth to faith. The crying, hunger, *etc.*, of a new born child, does not cause it to be born, but logically follows its birth. In the same way, crying to God for salvation, and hunger for the Word of God, does not cause one to be born again, but logically follows the new birth.

In regeneration an **enlightening of the mind** occurs. When Adam sinned against God...Adam was left in spiritual darkness. The spiritually unenlightened mind is called "the carnal mind," because the flesh drives it, and because it is not subject to the things of the Spirit. As Paul says, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Further, the mind that is carnal is blinded, not only by the flesh, but by the devil. It is written, "*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*" (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

In regeneration one is given supernatural, heavenly, divine and spiritual light. The enlightened mind enables one to know the hope that is in the calling of the gospel (Eph. 1:18); the things that are freely given to the believer through Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:11-12); and the light of the knowledge of God's glory in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

In regeneration a **change of heart** takes place. According to the Scriptures, the heart of man is like a stone, *i.e.*, cold, hard, barren and lifeless. But the new birth takes away the stony heart and replaces it with what is called, "a heart of flesh." As the Lord says in Ezekiel 36:36, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." And what shall be the result of this heart operation? What effect will it have upon the individual who undergoes this spiritual surgery? "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26-27).

Regeneration involves a complete change of nature, a new heart. The Spirit of God, as it were, performs heart surgery. He does not merely do a couple of arterial bypasses, or replace a few faulty heart valves. He completely removes the old stony heart, replacing it with a heart of flesh. By "heart of flesh" is meant a new nature, that is, one spiritually alive, zealous for the Lord, spiritually fruitful, and sensitive to the leading of the Lord's Word and Spirit. My friend, do you have a new heart?

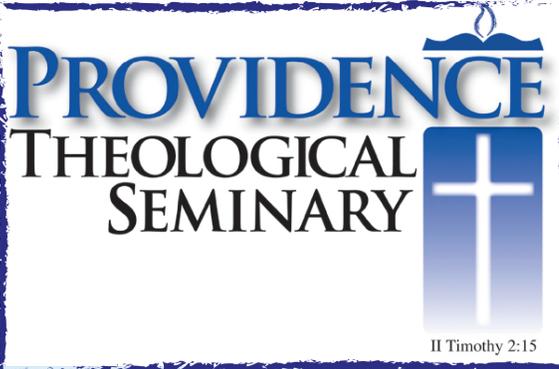
FINIS.

Here ends Part 1 of "The Doctrine of Salvation" by William W. Sasser. The second portion of this article will be published in the February 2015 issue of the Providence Theological Seminary Journal.



the Lord's Supper one of two ordinances instituted by Jesus Christ for observance in the Church; in this particular ordinance, the unleavened bread symbolizes Christ's body broken on the cross, while the wine symbolizes Christ's blood poured out for the forgiveness of the sins of God's elect; the cup of the Lord's Supper is the sign of the new covenant which Yahweh secured, ratified and established in the Person & Work of Christ Jesus; by their regular observance of this new covenant ordinance, believers proclaim the Lord's death until His Second Coming.

– **Matthew 28:18** –
"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth' (NASB).



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