

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MISCONCEPTIONS TACKED ON TO THE GOSPEL

Memory Verse

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

In the rest of this work, I wish to devote our full attention to *leading others to a saving faith in Christ*. I wish to say at the outset that *witnessing* has a great dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit. It does matter that we plan our sermon or lesson. It does not matter how well organized it is. It does not matter how articulate we are. It does not matter how well it is delivered or taught. Unless the Lord's Spirit gives life to the message, it will be nothing more than words of the flesh! Similarly, *witnessing rests in the power of the Spirit* and His blessing upon the Word of God. This is more than dependence on the Spirit of God; it is absolute necessity that the Holy Spirit prepare the heart and mind of the unbeliever to hear and receive the Word of God: salvation.

We may intellectually lead someone to accept the death and resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact, but such acknowledgement may be nothing more than an intellectual assent; a profession of faith. A profession of faith in Christ is not necessarily an indication of genuine faith and new birth. Intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel is not necessarily a possession of genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

For instance, Scripture tells us that demons believe in one God, and fear the Lord (James 2:19). Yet demons are not saved, and neither can they be saved, since there is no salvation plan for them. Salvation is only for the offspring of Adam (Heb. 2:14ff). Every person that truly repents and places their trust in Christ as Lord and Savior, is born of the Spirit. This is the promise of God (Rom. 10:13, Acts 16:31). Genuine commitment and trust of faith is preserved by the sovereign work of the Lord. The genuine believer in Jesus is saved for all eternity. Ah, but our assurance of salvation is *not* based upon any enduring quality we may intrinsically possess (Heb. 10:36-39; Phil. 1:6, 2:12, 13). It is the Lord that began the work in us. Therefore, He alone will accomplish it (Jude 1:24, 25). Many peoples of the world believe in God as demons do. Many people believe that God exists. This is commendable. However, this belief does not constitute a genuine saving faith in Christ.

Likewise, church membership is not salvation in Christ. Being a leader in our church, or a God-fearing leader in our community, does not mean we are saved. We may have gone through some religious rite: water-baptism, confirmation, or catechism; or theological training; and yet be void of regeneration and the redeeming grace of God. We may be very moral and believe strongly in the Bible, but this does not mean we are saved in Christ. To hear some tell it, "I have always believed," the Bible teaches that this is untrue (Eph. 2:1-4; Titus 3:1-5). A profession of faith does not necessarily mean that we possess genuine

saving faith in Christ. Saving faith is a total commitment and trust in Christ, though faith itself does not save us. We are saved through *the object of our faith*, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our salvation rests entirely upon Christ's merits and redemptive work. It is our personal trust in His finished work on Calvary that saves us. We are saved by His grace, and we are sustained by His grace. Yes, we are saved by His grace alone as the song says:

TIS ALL TO HIM I OWE

1. Sin has left its enduring stain.
2. So it's all to Him now I owe;
3. Sin has left its enduring stain.

1. Praise God my Lord who died for me.
2. Sin indeed left its stained resting on me.
3. Oh my friend receive Jesus the Lord.

1. Yes my Savior shed His blood for me.
2. But praise God His blood avails for me.
3. Yes the Savior shed His blood for you.

1. He alone died and arose again even for me.
2. Praise God He has now cleansed even me.
3. Come to Jesus, He alone died and 'rose even for you.

Chorus

*The sin debt, yes, I no longer owe;
For my Savior indeed has paid it all.
Now my all to Him I owe, yes even me;
So let me walk in Thy love I have come to know, yes even me.*

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LAYING THE FOUNDATION

While faith in Christ alone can save us, the faith that has saved us is never alone. Salvation means *deliverance*. When we are saved, we are *delivered* from *the penalty of sin*. This is the once-for-all act of God in Christ, never to be repeated. The sin-debt is fully paid by Christ; past and complete. We shall be saved: *delivered* from the very *presence of sin*, and we shall no longer be slaves of sin. This is in the future when we enter into His eternal glory. But for the present, the Lord is saving: *delivering* us from *the power of sin* in our daily lives in Christ. This is current and continual. This is the promise to every genuine believer in Christ. Deliverance from the power of sin is an assurance for all who have genuine faith in Christ. Christ gives us the power to change. Christ gives us a drive to know the Lord and His Word. Christ gives us a new desire: the desire to do His will. This is because He has given us a new nature. We are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

When we witness, we must expect that the Lord will save people, and He will. It is up to each of us to share the Gospel, but it is the Spirit of the Lord that saves and gives life. As we are faithful in sharing His Word with others, people will indeed be saved. The evidence of their salvation will be clear. They will have a new desire to walk in faith and obedience to Him. I would not give much credence to one who professes faith in Christ but shows no desire to know His Word and do His will. When someone claims Christ as Lord and Savior, we should expect that they will want to change. The transformation is within! We may never notice the change with our human eyes. Ah, but Christ will change us: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17 NIV).

We must present the Gospel of Christ clearly, concisely, and unadulteratedly to the sinner. This means we must first know the facts central to the Gospel message! Many sincere Christians are confused when trying to witness to the unsaved, because they are uncertain what is and what is not part of the saving

Gospel in Christ. What does the Gospel require to be saved? If we are ignorant of the essentials of belief salvation, we will be ineffective. How can we share something which we do not clearly grasp? Knowingly or unknowingly, we tend to preface the Gospel with conditions that are unwarranted, unbiblical, and more hindrance than help in sharing the Gospel. Often, it is not our outline of the conditions to faith that hinder our effectiveness, but rather *the things we tack on* in witnessing.

Once we know the central core of the Gospel, we need to know how to share the Gospel effectively with the unsaved. There is a preferred order in presenting the good news, if we are to be effective soul winners. We must know clearly the facts of the Gospel. Still, it is one thing to know the central facts, but an entirely different matter to share it effectively, and see people pass from death unto life through faith in our risen Lord. It is one thing to present the information, but another thing to express it as clearly and succinctly as possible. Almost anyone can shoot a rifle, but not everyone can consistently *hit the bull's eye*. We need to know how to *take steady aim*, and effectively lead others to a saving faith in Christ Jesus as Lord.

Lastly, we need to know the next steps, once someone professes Christ as Lord and Savior. That is, now that we have led someone to faith in Christ, what do we do next? It is this step (after people are saved) that we may fumble the ball, as it were. This is because we often do not know what to do next. The next step after coming to faith in Christ is to help them to maturity of faith in Christ. I call this *nurturing* people in their faith. If we do not have a well developed plan, it is better to refer the new Christian to a sound Bible Church that will do the nurturing to the best of their ability. It is critical that new Christians *get plugged in to* a strong witnessing and teaching church.

It is disastrous when someone fancies himself proficient in evangelism; kind of a “jackleg teacher” to the new Christian. Such *evangelists* (I use evangelist loosely) are wrong because they are void of a clear, concise, and well thought-out plan. Even worse, they don't encourage them to get into a church. These “jackleg” teachers may be sincere, but in time, their faith will drift and run aground like a *pilotless* ship. They do not know how to chart a course, let alone safely come to port. When asked for help by the new Christian, they say, “study your Bible.”

Without guidance, training, and fellowship with other Christians, this the new Christian may become discouraged. If he should venture out on his own to seek fellowship in another church, he may feel disloyal to those who lead him to Christ. The new Christian faces a dilemma with his loyalty, love, and devotion to Christ. He is then in great conflict of soul. Where there is no clear directive, no definite plan, and no followup, the new Christian is easy prey for the world, the flesh, and the devil. Some do follow up on new Christians, but it may be just *shooing from the hip*: followup without a clear plan. New Christians must have the benefit of the *body-life* of the assembly. The importance of the *body-life* of a God-fearing congregation cannot be overstated. There are *Lone Rangers* in the community of the redeemed that are used by the Lord. However, it is wrong to conclude that since the Lord uses them to lead others to Christ, that He is somehow approving of their *Lone Ranger* tactics. The Lord blesses His Word; not necessarily their methods. Most importantly, the community will not be transformed without establishing new believers and new churches. The community must have the benefit of expanding with Christian believers maturing and serving society.

Some say, “Frank, you are contradicting yourself.” While I strongly believe that the evangelist is the best person to start the nurturing process, he must first be sound in the faith, and working through a NT local church. Those who seek only to draw disciples to themselves, and stand aloof to the *body-life* of the total Kingdom of God, have missed Paul's meaning in (Rom. 12, I Cor. 12, and Eph. 4). Is the Lord pleased when we are hopping from one church to another, but never showing commitment to any sound Bible Church? The *Lone Ranger* type has no such commitment to a church.

The *Lone Ranger* Christian may attempt to justify his anti-church attitude and lack of commitment by saying, “I have not found a church true to the New Testament.” Some say, “Oh, I will not go to that church because that is where all those hypocrites are.” I want to answer, “That is all right, we've got room for one more!” If a self-proclaimed *evangelist* (minister) is poor in his theology, it is not because he has the

gift of evangelism; but rather, because he has not been faithful in studying the Word of God. It is better the new Christian be put on the doorstep of a sound Bible Church, rather than allowing him to *wing it*, void of nurturing and fellowship in the church. While many churches are in a poor condition spiritually, the congregations of the saints belong to the Lord. Those who come to Christ by faith in His shed blood belong to Christ. If the new believer is a Christian, he *belongs to Christ* who is the Lord God of all. The new Christian does not belong to the evangelist, nor does he belong to any particular church, fellowship, or denomination.

Therefore, as we proceed further into this study, what is the central core of the Gospel message? And how do we present the Gospel most effectively to the unsaved? Finally, what is the next step when someone professes Christ as Lord and Savior?

The *Gospel message* of Christ ought to be a simple thing to define. It is simple to share with another, the core of the Gospel! Still, as Adam's posterity, we tend make simple things more complex than they really are. The culprit is *traditions*. Yes, it is traditions that build up like excess baggage collected over the years. The problem is that we sometimes give more importance to what our predecessors said, rather than what Scripture says. Do not misunderstand me; traditions can help provide clarity. Traditions, however, must always be examined under the magnifying glass of Scripture; not vice versa. The principle must always be:

*Our faith and obedience is to Christ.
Scripture is the measurement Christ has established;
Faith and obedience must be measure by Scripture Christ established.*

Frank Parsons

Furthermore, it is not sufficient to casually quote Scripture as the final test of truth. *Scripture must interpret Scripture. Scripture alone must interpret itself.* Scripture stands on its own merit, because it is Christ that established the Scripture.

Some study Holy Writ; the Word of God; on the bases of *modern Existentialism*. That is, they approach Scripture purely based on the "here and now". To the Existentialist, church history has little value. The danger is that we are left to our own conclusions without any accountability. Others interpret from the *experiential*. That is, they interpret the Bible based on their own or others' experience. So Scripture is subjugated to personal whims and conjecture. Holy Writ is seen from a personal experience, void of its proper historical and linguistic origins. We read our experience into the Bible, which is *eisegesis*. What if our experience is only an illusion of the flesh, or the world's view, or an illusion from the prince of darkness?

Another error on our part is using the *emotionalist* interpretation. Here we interpret the Word of God by retrieving personal feelings; not fact. By this method, we actually make our own feelings the authority. We can become blind to the principle concept that the Bible alone is the bedrock of all interpretation, regardless of our feelings. The *emotionalist* interpreter is one of the more popular methods used in so-called "personal Bible study" today. *Emotionalistic* interpretation is spiritually deadly. The *emotionalist* interpreter is flying solely by a set of egocentric emotional wings. Ignored is the instrument panel: the Word of God. The assumption is that *if it feels right, it must be right*. We mistakenly assume that our emotions are being lead by the Spirit of God. The false assumption is that we have the seal of God's approval. Such *spiritual barnstorming* can lead to a crash in faith. Those who follow such a philosophy will likely end up shipwrecked in their faith. All three of these: the existentialist, the experientialist, and the emotionalist, are too subjective, and present a serious danger of superimposing our own view onto the precious Word of God.

What is the central core of the Gospel message? Let us examine some of the things that have been tacked on to the Gospel over the years. If anyone is offended by the following sections, I apologize. I am not seeking to single out any one group, but only to clarify the foundations of the Gospel by taking the leaven

from the bread. Let the Holy Word of the Lord stand on its own merit. And let us who are called by the grace of our Lord Jesus, submit to the final authority of His Word.

MISGUIDED ASSUMPTIONS CONCERNING SALVATION

There are numerous things we attempt to tack on to the salvation message. Some claim that there are things we must do *before* we can be saved. Here are a few examples; by no means an exhaustive list. Some are ideas that the carnal mind has conjured up. I have no intention of offending any person or group. But it is high time we have some spiritual backbone. We need to hold fast to the precious truth of the Gospel, lest we remain silent and become partakers of other people's sin of ill-advised teaching. Here is one of the most common fallacious teachings about evangelism: *Get your life in order, before coming to Christ*. This infers that we have to somehow get our life in order before we can come to faith in Christ.

Another error salvation teaching, is that *our good must somehow outweigh our bad in order to enter heaven*. This kind of humanized theology alleges that our works will be judged before the Lord to see if we make it into heaven. The supposition assumes that *salvation is like a ledger book*. Here a person has no assurance of going to heaven. In a sense, it does not matter what we believe about God. Some see *salvation as though person were balancing the books*. On one side are our bad deeds. On the other side are our good deeds. Our so-called good works must outweigh our bad works.

Still another misconception about salvation is that *we must do some type of penance or repentance* to be saved. The inference here is that the sinner must "come clean and show remorse." Salvation is seen as washing the outside of the bowl. This third false notion is *tacking on to the Gospel the idea that you must do penance or show repentance* in order to get saved. The conclusion is drawn that if there is no penance or repentance we are not saved. Anyone coming to faith will have repentance because repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit produces godly repentance unto salvation in Christ Jesus; not the flesh. If the oceans were empty and we filled them with tears, this would not get us into heaven.

The last misconception about salvation, unfortunately, brings a storm of bitter debate, controversy, and condemnation by some groups. The error here is that *salvation is incomplete without bathing our sins away in water*. In other words, water-baptism is absolutely necessary to be saved. This is without doubt the most controversial and divisive issue in the Church. This teaching contends the necessity of *the rite of water-baptism to be saved*. Water-baptism is incapable of cleaning the soul; this is the work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11).

All four examples, in one way or another, have tacked on some requirement for salvation. These misguided teachings rip at the fiber and unity of the Body of Christ: the Church. Such *tack-ons*, however sincere, place an immense stumbling block before those curious about faith in Christ our blessed Lord and Master.

Some Assume We Must Get Our Life in Order to Come to Faith in Christ

Some assume that we have to somehow get our lives in order before we can come to faith in Christ. The unregenerate cannot get their life in order before coming to Christ, even if they want to get it in order. They may show some semblance that their life is in order, but this semblance finds no approval from the Lord of all mercy and grace. The Lord looks upon the inner motive; the heart. To illustrate, some think we have to drop all the vices of life: immorality, drugs, alcohol, corruption and the like, to be "accepted by the Lord."

In the first place, the unregenerate is impotent and unable to clean up his life to the satisfaction of the Lord, even if he so desired. This is because we are in bondage to sin (Titus 3:3ff). Secondly, even if we could clean up our lives, this would merely make us self-righteous. The Bible says, "All our righteousness is filthy rags" before the Lord (Isa. 64:6). The Word of God says, "There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10). The Christian is saved from the penalty of sin by his faith in Christ; not on the basis of his good works (Gal. 2:20, 21; Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 3:9; Titus 3:3-8).

Once we are truly born again by His Spirit and saved by His grace, the Lord Himself, not we ourselves, will begin a transformation and a change in us (Titus 2:11-14). I do not change my life to get saved. Once I am saved, my life changes by the power and grace of God. Otherwise, we would be teaching erroneously, as some do even to this day, that we must have good works to be saved. This erroneous teaching goes something like this: *If we will clean up our life the best we can, the Lord will accept us.* The error is what Paul saw in the unbelieving Jews:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth (Rom. 10:1-4 KJV).

Others See Salvation as Balancing a Ledger Book

Similarly, some describe salvation as balancing a ledger-book. On one side are our bad deeds. On the other side are our good deeds. When the books are opened, the Lord will judge each of us by our works. If our good works outweigh our bad, we're in. If our bad works outweigh our good, we go to hell. Some say the Bible teaches that we are judged by what is written in the books. Let us take a look at this passage to see exactly what is saying:

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

The judgment is not to determine who is saved and lost. Neither is this a judgment to see if anyone had enough so-called "good works." Rather, it is determining the degree or status of each unbeliever in the lake of fire. The first books referred to apparently reveal a person's sins, and possibly their rejection of the Gospel. This first set of books demonstrates that we have sinned and justly deserve the wrath of God, since no one merits heaven. Paul clarifies this idea in Romans 3:10-20. Our Lord said this is the work you must do to have eternal life:

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29).

It is impossible for a Christian to be judged at the Great White Throne of Judgment. This is because we who have believed in Christ have already passed out of judgment into eternal life, and will not come into condemnation or judgment (John 3:18, 36; 5:24, 25; Rom. 8:1, 31-39). True, we will be judged as Christians and held accountable for how we lived and our service for Christ. But this judgment is for rewards of faithful service, not salvation judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-15). When a Christian dies, the Bible says he goes to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:5-8). If we are judged at the Great White Throne as some erroneously assert, how is it that the saints in Christ will judge the world and even the fallen angels? Paul says,

**Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?
Do you not know that we will judge angels? (1 Cor. 6:2a, 3a).**

No, my dear friend, we shall not be judged at the Great White Throne! And don't forget that there is another book: "and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*. --if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12, 15). The unbeliever will be told that his name is not written in the *Lamb's Book of Life*. If a person's name is not found in the Lamb's Book of Life, he is forever lost; he is unredeemed. Jesus said,

"I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:25-28).

Of course, we could devote an entire volume to the topic of the Lamb's Book of Life, and still not resolve many of the questions surrounding it. One thing is clear: only the saved will be in the book of life. Thus we must plead with the sinner to repent and trust Christ as his Lord and Savior. It is only those who personally trust Christ as Lord and Savior that are found in the book of life. The other books will determine his level in the lake of fire. That is, the other books reveal his or her degree of suffering in the lake of fire. Not all will suffer to the same degree in the lake of fire.

We may wonder why God does not just save everyone. I would turn the question around and say it this way: *When we become aware of the holiness and righteousness of God in contrast to our utter sinfulness, we shall marvel that the Lord saves anyone in the first place.* We simply do not clearly see our utter depravity, innate hostility, and rebellion against the Lord. How much less, then, can we comprehend the majesty, infinite holiness, and righteousness of the Lord? We are judging through the eyes of sinful and rebellious flesh. How can we see the wonders of the unsurpassed glory of the Lord? Amen; the Lord is merciful, but His mercy is found in Jesus Christ alone (Acts 4:12). In that Day, the ungodly will no longer doubt God's judgment, nor wonder why he is sent to the lake of fire. We, on the other hand, will marvel at His grace and mercy that we were accepted in the Beloved, Jesus Christ.

The Idea of Repentance

Another thing some have tacked on to the Gospel is the idea of *repentance*. That is, we have to have "a tear jerking experience; genuine repentance." The false belief is that when we do penance, we move God to look upon us in favor, and the Lord will *come on our terms and bidding*. If we could fill the oceans with tears of sorrow, what is that to Him? Such a nonsensical proposition is Biblically bankrupt. It is our trust in Christ as Lord and Savior that will please God (John 3:16-18). Some will say, "But I must have a repentant heart towards God." I say, Amen! But if it were not for His grace, none of us would have a repentant heart before our Maker. Our hearts are desperately wicked and self-deceptive. And the Lord truly knows our hearts (Jer. 17:9).

To make matters worse, some stand around the penitent person to "spark him on in such foolishness." They tell him he must continue to repent "until the light breaks through." I am mocking those who show such contrition toward the Lord. What I object to is laying down such conditions for coming to faith in Christ. People that turn to Christ as Lord and Savior should show repentance. And we do show evidence of repentance, because of the Holy Spirit's work in our life. It is not because we initiate an egocentric repentance that we *earn the right* to come to faith in Christ. In our darkened state of unregeneracy, we are blinded by our own self-righteousness, the power of Satan, and the ungodly influences of the world. It is not until the Holy Spirit begins to illuminate our hearts and minds, that we begin to turn to the Lord and bring forth true repentance.

If one professes faith in Christ, but shows no change of attitude or action from their past life, I would not give *plug nickel* for such a profession of faith. Repentance literally means a *changed mind*. The Holy Spirit and He alone is the One that initiates and causes the transformation. In our darkened and unregenerate state, no one seeks the Lord. We are the ones in bondage and blind, and it is the Lord of Hosts that seeks us out for His good pleasure. There are millions of people who are penitent about their

sin. Yet many penitent people reject the idea we are saved and come to favor before God by faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. They wish to come to God, but *on their terms*. Even worse, people wish to come to the “god” of their own making rather than to the Lord, who alone can save (Isa. 43:10, 11; 45:21; Hos. 13:4). They have set up their own terms based upon their *god*. Let us heed Joshua’s words (Josh. 24:15). Those will not submit to the standard of His holy Word will perish in their sin (John 8:24). People have been “going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3).

The Rite of Water-baptism

Another serious error of fallen humanity and the religious community is the tacked on notion that, prior to coming to faith and being saved, we must receive the rite of water-baptism. Some would have us believe that water-baptism by the Church, whether sprinkled, poured, or immersed, is necessary to remove the filth of sin. Those who hold this position contend that the Spirit cleanses us from sin, but we must still wash away our sins through the Church by the rite of water-baptism. *Traditionalists* have indeed superimposed their view over the plain teaching of the Word of God. Some *Traditionalist* groups have led us to think that their particular sect has the power to save us; that their *incantations* are the means of life and death. There is nothing further from the truth. This evil lie still holds millions and millions in bondage even at this very hour!

Please do not read more into my statement than I have said. I am not arguing for one form of water-baptismal mode over another. Some see water-baptism as a sacrament. Others see it as an ordinance or act of obedience. Believe it or not, some misguidedly reject any form of water-baptism. Others will argue for pedobaptism (infant baptism). I prefer the believer’s baptism by immersion. I am opposed to those who teach the doctrine of *baptismal regeneration* whereby people claim that no one can be saved unless he has been water-baptized by their sect.

Those who insist on the necessity of water-baptism to be saved say something like this: “We cannot be reborn and enter the kingdom of God, unless we are water baptized.” Water-baptism is so strongly maintained that even if we have truly repented, and cling to Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we cannot in any way be saved until we are water-baptized. Others will even go so far as to assert that we must also be *properly* baptized. Still others are adamant that the baptism must be done by *their sect* to be legitimate; all other baptisms are discredited and unacceptable. Some demand that unless the proper mode is carried out, the baptism is invalid!

Since this is not a treatise on water-baptism, but on the central core of the Gospel of salvation, I do not wish to wander far from the topic. But let me make this observation as it relates to the salvation of humanity. First, the word baptize does not necessarily have anything to do with *water*. Only by examining the text meticulously and methodically can we determine some meaningful Biblical understanding. For example, Jesus spoke of his *death as a baptism* (Mark 10:39). There is no hint of *water* here. Paul speaks of the people of Israel being *baptized in the Red Sea* (1 Cor.10:1ff), but there is no water implied. The Egyptian Army followed Israel, and they were literally water-baptized and died. Paul says that there is one baptism necessary to be saved. This is the baptism by the Holy Spirit, which means being *in-grafted* to Christ by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). There is absolutely no reference to water-baptism in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul not only says we are *spiritually baptized by the Spirit of God*, but also says that we are *spiritually circumcised by the Holy Spirit of God* (Col. 2:11, 12; Phil. 3:3). Some errantly see water-baptism whenever they see the word, *baptism*; but this is a serious mistake! This is not the teaching of Scripture.

Regarding water-baptism as a means of conveying saving grace in Christ, this is an insult to the Spirit and grace of God. The thief on the cross that believed that Jesus was, in truth, the Messiah, was genuinely saved by faith in Christ without any rite of water-baptism. Our merciful Lord declared to the thief that believed in Him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’ (Luke 23:43). Some who believe in *baptismal regeneration* ardently claim that the thief on the cross *was under the Old Covenant!* And some of them allege that “the thief on the cross was baptized by blood: *martyrdom baptism* (His

death was a baptism). Still others maintain that “the thief was water baptized after his death.” My friend, this is like *swallowing a camel and choking on gnat*.

Jesus said, ‘he that believe shall pass out of death into life and shall not come into condemnation’ (John 5:24, 25). Our Lord did not say *he that believes and is baptized is saved*. The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas did not say to believe and be baptized, but only to believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Scripture declares,

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:9, 10 NIV).

Therefore we must unequivocally reject any argument for any conditions to being saved, other than personal faith in, and genuine commitment to, our risen Lord Jesus as Savior. Some will still say, “But there are passages that speak of water-baptism as related to salvation” (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:38). Mark 16 is a very questionable text. It is unwise *hermeneutics* to build a doctrine based on such a disputed passage. Even if the text were proven to be genuine, Mark does not teach that we must be water baptized to be saved. The last clause interprets itself. Let us look at Mark 16.

The General Statement

“He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16a).

Specific Declaration for Salvation

“-but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16b).

A person is condemned for disbelief! The last clause determines meaning here: “but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16b). The text does not say, *he who has disbelieved and refuses water-baptism is condemned*. Mark 16:16 is very explicit. A person is condemned for his disbelief. To read baptismal regeneration into Mark 16:16 is one of the worst forms of *eisegesis*. (Reading into the text that which is not actually in the text.) But again, this is a questionable text, since Mark 16:9-20 is not found in two of the older Greek texts of the New Testament. Therefore, we must be cautious in building doctrine based on such text.

Now let us consider the apostle Peter’s statement in Acts 2. Peter is calling for national repentance from the nation of Israel. Peter is addressing Israel nationally (Acts 2:22, 23). Here is Peter’s statement:

Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call (Acts 2:37-39 KJV).

This is similar to what John the Baptist did (Mark 1:4ff) except that Peter clearly points to Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. Peter’s statement in Acts 2:38 is not referring to the conditions for salvation. He is calling for national repentance. He is declaring God’s promise of restoration of the nation Israel (compare Acts 2:37-39 to 3:17-26). Still, even if we were to take this in the most literal sense, the text must be interpreted in relation to other epistolary passages in Acts and the rest of the New Testament. We have already noted that Dr. Luke (who wrote Acts) says faith in Christ is the only condition (Acts 16:31).

We must remember also, that the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius *before* he and his household *were water-baptized*. The giving of the Holy Spirit prior to water-baptism clearly declares *Cornelius was already saved BEFORE* he was *water-baptized* (compare Acts 10:44-46 to vv 47, 48). The Spirit would not have been given if water-baptism was a condition for being saved. Water-baptism of Cornelius follows his salvation; it did not in any way precede his salvation in Christ.

Paul recounts a similar incident in Acts 19:1-7. At this insistence, people were re-baptized in the name of the Lord. That is, these people were re-baptized by Paul in the authority of Jesus Christ. This is the same

as Matthew 28:18-20; Jesus is giving the disciples authority to baptize. Paul then laid his hands on them to receive the charismata (grace-gift) of God, the Holy Spirit preceded water-baptism. Paul re-baptizes them because Scripture says, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit' (Acts 19:2). All these disciples knew the teaching of John the Baptist. These believers did not know the Messiah came and died for sinners, or that there was a Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Acts must be interpreted in light of other New Testament writings, particularly the epistles. When the text in Acts 19:1ff is compared to the rest, we immediately realize there is no idea of baptismal regeneration as a prerequisite to salvation. The cleansing of the person is solely by the work of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

It is likely some of the early Jewish believers tried to superimpose circumcision to be saved and come under the Abrahamic blessing (compared Acts 15:1ff to Gal. 5:1ff). But the New Testament is clear that neither circumcision, nor water-baptism, are conditions for salvation. Once a person comes to faith in Christ, he ought to be obedient to the command of our risen Lord and be water-baptized by a believing New Testament Church. Any attempt to add conditions for coming to Christ for salvation, beyond genuine faith and trust in Christ as Lord, must be refuted. Scripture is plain; we are saved by faith alone in Christ (Rom. 5:1).

CONCLUSION

The Church has suffered many fractures on such doctrinal issues. I suppose some would advocate remaining silent and say, "Let each go by his own conscience." People will do that, whether not there is a stand for the truth. Besides, silence allows the more powerful groups to lord it over others. Let us forever echo Paul's stand in Galatians 2. People are sheep, and they are easily led, unless we stand and be counted for the truth. We are each going to give an account. This accounting will be more stern for those who are teachers of the Word of God (James 3:1).

However, we will not only be accountable for what we did or didn't say concerning the Gospel, but we shall also be judged for things we added to or omitted from the Gospel! The Lord will hold us accountable for things we failed to refute. Let us follow the example of the apostle Paul and others who willingly stood for the truth, even at the cost of their lives. Most of us are sincere. The problem here is we must not allow misguided philosophies to defame the blessed name and work of our Lord Jesus and the Spirit of God. Let us stand in love, but let us stand strong and speak out for our Lord.

