

# The Baptism Cult

## Exposing the

# International Church of Christ

by

Gene Cook Jr.



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Church of Christ**

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**SAINT AZTEC BOOKS**

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To my wife, Grace, who has been an instrument in the hands of God. Through her, God has taught me the true meaning of grace and forgiveness.

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**The Baptism Cult**

**Exposing  
The International  
Church of Christ**

## **Introduction**

**Chances are you picked up this book because you have been a member of the International Church of Christ (ICC), or you have known someone who belongs to this movement. Whatever the case, I do not believe anything happens by chance. It is by the providence of God according to His plan that you will be exposed to the material contained in this book.**

**If you are currently a member of the ICC, I challenge you as a professing Christian to examine the claims in this book and compare them with the Bible. It is my desire and prayer that you would abandon this movement and come to a proper understanding of salvation.**



**Introduction**

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

**Perhaps you have encountered an ICC member or have a friend or family member in the movement. I commend you for being obedient to scripture and following the admonition of God's word:**

*"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."*

**2 Timothy 2:15**

*"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame."*

**1 Peter 3:15-16**

**This is the fundamental question that needs an urgent answer:**

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**"Is the ICC a cult?"**

**The answer is undeniably, "yes." The ICC itself admits that it is a cult in an attempt to downplay reality. While there may be many definitions of what a cult is, this particular movement is a cult in the psychological, sociological and theological sense.**

**The purpose of this book is not to address the psychological problems with the ICC, but to focus on the theological problems. It can be proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that this group holds to a doctrine of salvation that is unbiblical.**

**Gene Cook Jr.**

# **What is The International Church of Christ?**

## **Chapter One**

Like Joseph Smith of *Mormonism*, Charles Taze Russell of the *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society*, a leader who by customary standards can be classified as "power hungry," heads the International Church of Christ (ICC).

Kip McKean began what is now known as the International Church of Christ on June 1, 1979, when he called thirty would-be "disciples" to be "totally committed to Christ." According to the ICC's own website, [www.ICOC.org](http://www.ICOC.org), the movement began in Boston, Massachusetts, later becoming known as "The Boston Church of Christ." In January 2002, the ICC

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boasts 430 churches worldwide with a membership of 134,259. An average Sunday attendance is 192,169, which is remarkable growth for a movement less than 25 years old. One factor that Kip McKean contributes to this growth is Kip McKean himself. At the *Super Church Boston Leadership Conference* in August 1992, McKean stated:

"We're the *flat dynamic* decision making body that reflects Los Angeles. We've got the *coolness* of David and Colleen, we've got the ethnic mix, and we've got the brains of Marty and Myself."

"Notice which sector had increased the most, numerically. The Cross and the Switchblade. Say, 'Why is that?' Well, I was in there! Well, which one grew the most percentage wise? Well, let's look again. Seventy-five percent, pretty good when you're leading both columns. Well, why was that? Because *I* was there." (Kip McKean, *ibid.*)

The movement seems to be most active on college campuses and in the military, which is one of the reasons why they are flourishing. The reason why they are successful on college campuses is because they have something to offer young people: a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose and a sense of direction. There are students on college campuses that are away from home for the first time that may not have friends. These people befriend them, talk with them and invite them to their events. Then they proceed to do what is called, "love bombing." This is where they shower these peo-

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ple with an artificial form of love.

There's nothing wrong with showering people with love, there's nothing wrong with befriending people, there's nothing wrong with inviting them to a Bible study, but the question is, "What's your motivation?" When your motivation is to please the overseers of the church or somehow participate in earning your salvation, there's a problem!

True motivation for the Christian comes out of a heart of gratitude after having understood what God has done for us through the cross. Our motivation should come from our gratitude to Christ for the grace that He has lavished on us. If our motivation comes from anywhere else it is a false motivation! For the Jehovah Witness, their motivation is numbers and works. They're going to work for their salvation. The same is true with the ICC. Anytime that you have a "works" salvation — a salvation based not on what Christ did, but on what you did or what you can do — you run into legalism, false motivations and many other difficulties that accompany a system built on a salvation of "works."

The fast growth can be attributed to many factors. As is common with all cults, there is the belief that the organization is the mediator between God and man. If one leaves the organization, one is considered to be "leaving God." This was clearly taught by McKean in the 1994, in *Revolution Through Restoration*, and continues to be taught by the ICC as a whole:

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"Certainly to leave the family of God, the *true church*, is to leave God." "We have tried to pull into *God's movement* the remnant of all those who are surrendered to the Scriptures and who believe God's dream is to evangelize the world in one generation. We will continue to seek other isolated disciples who may be members in *false churches*."

As a pastor, I have spoken with former members of the ICC that have relayed stories of horror experienced by them and others while associated with the organization, but yet insist that the ICC is God's movement and maintain that it is a Christian institution. On May 6, 1990, while at the *Boston Congregational Meeting*, McKean stated:

*"This is the true movement of God. There's no other group, no other church that can touch this. The Boston Church is not any church, it is the Jerusalem of God's modern day movement,"*

Further stating in August 1995 at the *Johannesburg Leadership Conference, Preach the Word*:

"When you say we're the only true church...that's gonna tick the religious people off."

"Today, we are calling out of the world, calling out of the

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denominations, out of the mainline churches, out of the campus ministries all of the people who desire to be a part of *God's restored true church and movement.*" (Kip McKean, *ibid.*)

**The ICC maintains an intense discipleship program that all members are required to participate. At the *Discipleship Partners 1988 Boston Leadership Conference*, McKean said:**

"To not have a discipleship partner is to be rebellious to God and to leadership of this congregation. The person that you are discipling must believe, must trust, that you're out for God and their best interest, because there's going to be some advice they will not understand, but if they trust that you're out for God and their best interest, they will obey. They must believe your judgment is better than theirs."

According to the *Boston Bulletin's* October 22, 1989 issue, Teresa Ferguson was quoted as saying, at the 1988 *Boston leadership conference*:

"Ultimately, if we do not trust these people (disciplers), we do not trust God. To the extent that I trust my discipler, I am in reality trusting God."

"Disciplers" are those who are assigned to each member to help them with accountability and growth and in many ways assumes the role of the Holy Spirit. The members are encouraged not to act without the

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consultation and permission of their own discipler. New converts are what the ICC calls "disciples." They have become convinced that unless they are "disciples" in the ICC they cannot be followers of Christ.

In the "discipleship" process, an experienced member (their discipler) closely mentors the new convert. The new convert is asked to write down all of the sins that they can remember. When they meet together they discuss those sins, going through them one at a time in great detail. The new convert is asked to confess each sin individually. In doing so, through talking about it and, "*confessing our sins to one another*," they're convinced that they are forgiven. A list of television reports concerning "sin lists" and confessions" can be seen at the website: <http://members.aol.com/djrtx/sin-stold.htm>.

In time, a new convert may perceive a problem. They may see something that doesn't look right, either behaviorally or doctrinally. They may have talked to someone who pointed out things in the Bible that don't coincide with what they're being taught. They go to their discipler and say, "Look, I have a question about this verse, it seems to be indicating something different than what you have told me." In response, the leader will say something to the effect of, "Wait a minute! Who are you to question our teaching? Don't you remember when you came to us you were sleeping around, you were smoking dope, you had this problem or that problem? Now, who are you to question us after we helped you and trained you?" The new convert backs off. This now becomes the controlling tool in



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keeping these people in alignment with the cult's purpose and direction.

In connection with this "discipleship" program, an aggressive "evangelism" program is in place. Cults are one of the most motivated groups on the face of the earth. Jehovah's Witnesses can be seen in any neighborhood on any given Saturday morning, the ICC is no different. In their aggressive discipleship program, disciples are required to go out a couple times a week to do what they call "sharing." They'll hang out in malls and in supermarkets, you may have even been approached in the supermarket by one of them. They'll say things such as, "I'd like to invite you to a Bible talk," or, "I'd like to invite you to a BBQ," or "I'd like to invite you to a picnic where we will be playing volleyball." They're very aggressive!

McKean stated at *The Super Church, Boston Leadership Conference* of Aug 1992:

"Every member of the church is in a "Bible Talk." They are expected to bring visitors every week. Everybody's expected to bring visitors every week! They don't bring a visitor, we ask why. Not pressure, I'm concerned about the soul, you're not fruitful, you're going to be sawed off the vine."

This is not biblical evangelism. Biblical evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel. It is not an invitation to a church volleyball game or a barbecue at the park. There is often a level of deception that accompanies these invitations. If we were to ask what church we are being invited, the most common answer is, "A non-denominational Christian church." Oftentimes when con-

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fronted with the association of the Boston movement, the ICC representative will say, "Yes, but everything is changed and we are really different than we used to be."

There are many other psychological and sociological problems that could be documented. However, these are only the symptoms of the real problem that lie at the root: the proclamation of "another gospel." Any group that takes the name "Christian," and yet deviates on the most fundamental level from the historic, orthodox Christian faith should be expected to have serious problems among its leadership and its laity. This is the case with the ICC.

By definition, the word "cult" has many meanings. For the Christian the term "cult" has a specific meaning: A counterfeit Christian movement.

When the word "cult" is used in a theological sense, it refers to a movement that is heretical, a movement that is a counterfeit of Christianity. People may use the term "cult" in general to describe a group who holds fervently to a particular set of beliefs. However, when we as Christians speak of a "cult," in the theological sense, we are referring to a counterfeit Christian movement. There are numerous counterfeit Christian movements, e.g., Jehovah Witnesses, Mormonism, Scientology and Churches of Christ. In addition to these cults that already exist, there doesn't seem to be any indication that new cults are going to stop organizing anytime soon. On March 26, 1997, a movement in San Diego known as "*Heavens Gate*" who were identified by some non-Christians sects to be Christians,

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made international headlines when they committed mass suicide. Members were persuaded that just before Easter a UFO would take them to be reincarnated on another planet. Those who doubted were referred to the Bible, the Book of *Revelation, chapter 11*.

When groups take on the title of "Christian" and do not adhere to the Bible, they are classified theologically as a cult. We need to understand why they are considered as such. As a new Christian I had several opportunities to talk with people associated with various cultic beliefs and I became confused. I could see that there was something wrong in their belief system but I couldn't exactly put my finger on what it was. This is because cults are by definition an imitation of the real thing.

Another characteristic that is common among cults is that they will convince their followers that they are God's group; they are God's only true work on earth. That is exactly what the ICC claims. For example, Mckean states in *Revolution Through Restoration II*, as quoted in *UpsideDown Magazine* in 1994:

"In just fifteen years, the Bible revolution, which began in 1979 has multiplied by the power of God into 156 churches with a collective attendance of almost 90,000 in 60 of the approximately 200 nations of the world! The parallels to the book of Acts **unmistakably mark this movement to be of God.**"

This group claims that they are the only Christians

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on earth. They claim that you cannot be a Christian unless you have been baptized in the ICC. This would seem to be an immediate red flag to anyone who has any spiritual discernment. Like most other cults, the ICC is extremely legalistic in their understanding of the Bible and salvation. They outline how a Christian should live according to the commandments of the Bible and the rules of the ICC. They convince people that baptism is the mode in which the Holy Spirit is given. They teach their members that if they're going to be saved they must obey all these commandments including the commandant of water baptism in the one true Church. This is not the biblical picture of salvation by grace through faith.

The church generally grows as unsuspecting people are invited to come and study the Bible. As they begin to study the Bible and doctrine of the ICC, they gradually become persuaded that this group *is* teaching the truth. Remember, Jesus said that there would be false teachers who would come in sheeps clothing. They'll look just like the real thing.

I have a Rolex watch that I've passed around from time to time in classes that I have taught regarding cults. I tell everyone to take a good look at my watch. I call it my "cult watch" because it looks exactly like the real thing but it isn't. It'll fool just about anyone who doesn't know anything about Rolexes.

I pass it around and ask people their opinion. Some say, "Wow, that's a nice watch!" Little do they know that I only paid forty dollars for that watch, but it looks

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as if it's worth two or three thousand dollars.

When I pass it around, I ask people to look closely because there's one thing that sets this watch apart. On a true Rolex, the second hand is sweeping in a continuous motion, whereas in the counterfeit, since it runs on a battery, the hand ticks. Anybody that knows anything about a real Rolex knows right away that it's a counterfeit.

The reason that I call it my "cult" watch is because it's a counterfeit, and anyone that knows anything about the Bible knows that these groups that teach "works" salvation are counterfeit by nature. The problem is that unless you know what a Rolex looks like, you might be susceptible to buy this counterfeit for five hundred bucks - and think you're getting a good deal at that!

The same is true with Christianity. People who don't know anything about the Bible come into these groups and begin to study their teachings and as a result they become convinced that this is the "true church."

There is much confusion as to the nature of the true Gospel. The gospel is the work of God changing you from the inside out. The unsuspecting disciple sees only with a natural eye. He sees an outward change and difference. What he sees is his people marching in uniformity rather than people marching in the *unity* of the Spirit. This is something that is very attractive to them. The military marches in *uniformity*, the Body of Christ marches in *unity* - there's a big difference! They see these groups and become convinced that this *is* the "true church."

## **Defining the Gospel**

### **Chapter Two**

In the book of Galatians, Paul was addressing a group of people called the "Judaizers," who were teaching that a person had to be circumcised and observe other Jewish festivals and rituals in order to become a Christian. It wasn't just salvation by faith, it was faith plus all these other things. Paul wrote the letter of Galatians in order to correct this false teaching.

Paul confronts them:

*"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different*

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*gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"*

Galatians 1:6-9

Paul didn't pull any punches!

The Greek word for "accursed" is "*anathama*," which is the strongest Greek word for "condemnation." It means, "Eternally cursed." Basically... "To hell with you!"

Paul was saying, "If anybody comes and preaches a different gospel than the gospel that I preach to you, let him be "anathama" - the strongest Greek word for a curse.

*"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel!"*

Galatians 1:6

The gospel of Christ is the gospel of the *grace* of Christ. Grace means unmerited favor from God. Grace is what God has lavished upon us freely. This grace is

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not based on what we did, but on what *He* did, and is built on the finished work of Jesus Christ.

If we compare the biblical teaching to any of these groups we will find where they are in error. Salvation by works demands that it's not enough that Christ died for our sins. It's not enough to simply believe and trust in Christ, but there are things that we must do in order to achieve, keep and maintain our salvation. Paul warns them, "Don't have anything to do with these people. Let them be accursed. If it's a different gospel than the one that we preach to you, let them be accursed."

Naturally, the next question that follows is, "Well, Paul, what is the gospel that you preach?"

*"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."*

1 Corinthians 15:1-2

Paul makes three statements:

"This is the gospel that you *received*."

"This is the gospel by which you *stand*."

"This is the gospel in which you are *saved*."

Paul also tells us (in the following verses) that this was the same gospel that he had received; it's the *only* gospel! If anybody preaches any other gospel, don't have anything to do with them.



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*"For I delivered to you as of **first importance**  
(Paul's saying, "This is the **most important thing**,  
"What I'm about to tell you is of **first importance!**")  
...what I also received, that Christ died for our sins  
according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried,  
and that He was raised on the third day according to  
the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then  
to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five  
hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain  
until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He  
appeared to James, then to all the apostles."*

1 Corinthians 15:3-7

That's it! That's the gospel! Christ died, Christ was buried and Christ was raised! When we believe this, we have salvation! When we believe this, we *are* saved. We stand in Christ. It's the gospel that we received by which we are saved by Christ.

How can a simple knowledge of Christ's death, burial and resurrection save us? When He went to the cross and died, He made payment, He atoned for our sins; He was the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. In going to the cross, in sacrifice, He paid for our sins, He was buried, and He rose from the dead.

*"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. '"*

John 2:19

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The resurrection thus validated His statements of what He would accomplish. He prophesied ahead of time that He would rise from the dead, and the Bible tells us that He *did* rise. He validated His claims to pay for our sins and the Father's acceptance of His work:

*"...who was declared the Son of God with power  
(Or as a result of) by the resurrection from the dead,  
according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Romans 1:4

If there were no resurrection, He would be no different than any other religious leader who made claims. But the fact is, He did rise!

By us placing our faith in this Christ, who paid for our sins and who rose on the third day, we have salvation. It's not enough merely to know that it happened, it takes a faith that is comparable to trust. The faith that the Bible speaks of is a faith that causes us to go in a different direction, it causes us to respond to life according to the knowledge that we have in Christ. If you truly believe that the building in which you work is going to catch on fire in the next five minutes, you, along with everyone else, will get up and walk out of there. The bible communicates to be a saving faith. If we truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that He rose and gave us the Holy Spirit, our lives will reflect that belief! If they don't, then John tells us that the love of God is not in us (1 John 2:4). Paul clearly defines

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His gospel, nothing more, nothing less. It's pretty simple and very straightforward.

I say that the gospel is straightforward, but as simple and as straightforward as it is, the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:18, that the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit because he does not have the Spirit. These are life breathing, spiritual teachings that can only be understood and comprehended by the Spirit of God. When the natural man tries to understand this, he can't, and becomes confused because in his life experience he has worked for everything that he has ever possessed and so he wrongly assumes that he also has to work for salvation. This mentality also appeals to the flesh because it gives him a sense of participation and now, a sense of pride for what *he* has accomplished.

*"Truly; truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."*

John 5:24

Jesus is saying that if you believe on the One that sent Him, you have (*has*) eternal life. *Has* is in the present tense. *Has* is something that we possess now. *Has* is something that believers possessed at the time when He spoke these words to them. It's not something that we obtain in the future; it's not something that we

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*only* look forward to; it's something that we possess now! What did Jesus say were the requirements for us to obtain this eternal life? *"If you believe on Him who sent Me, after you hear My word you will have eternal life. You will not come into judgment, but you will pass from death to life."*

The Bible teaches us that we are all under God's condemnation. When we hear the Word of God and believe, God has quickened our souls and for the first time gives us the light and the understanding to comprehend His Word. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). When we hear the Word of God and we believe on the One who sent Him (Jesus), we have eternal life. He doesn't say anything about baptism, tithing, evangelism or going to church. Although we should do all these things as Christians out of gratitude and obedience, He doesn't say that these things are requirements or prerequisites for our salvation.

When contrasted with the teaching of the ICC, we see a contradiction. Kip McKean's wife, Elena, stated in the December 20, 1987 issue of the *Boston Bulletin's* article entitled: *"Satan Masquerades As An Angel:"*

"Too few churches call people to make the decision to be disciples *at baptism* as Jesus says in Matthew 28:19 ('Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ') If you have not done this, your baptism is invalid."

It's one thing to contradict the bible - we expect that

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from cults - but what's surprising is that Kip McKean's wife, Elena, contradicts Kip McKean who stated at the *1987 Perfectly United, Boston Women's Retreat*

"Who is the candidate for baptism? It is the one who *is* a disciple."

If Jesus accidentally left out baptism when He made these statements, then He did a serious injustice to those who read His words. He should have included baptism because He made a very specific promise. He said, "If you believe, you will have eternal life." The ICC does not believe this. They say that it's not enough to simply believe or to have a saving faith; you must also be completely obedient to everything that the Bible commands. McKean was quoted in the June 16, 1985 issue of the *Boston Bulletin* as saying:

"Since the blood of Christ is *contacted at baptism*, then let us stand firm on teaching that *to become* a Christian, according to the Bible, one must have faith in Christ and respond by *repentance and baptism...*"

How obedient do you need to be? How much obedience is enough obedience?

I recently asked a man, "How much obedience does it take, one hundred percent? Ninety percent? Seventy-five percent? How much does it take?"

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He answered, "Well, we should be one hundred percent obedient."

I said, "I agree, but what percentage of obedience are you? How obedient are you? Are you one hundred percent obedient? Don't tell me that you are because by telling me that, you'll be lying and then you'll be less than one hundred percent obedient."

If we believe that we must be perfect in and of ourselves, we'll never measure up! That's why Christ came and died for us and offers His salvation freely because no man will be justified by obedience to the law or any other rule that man lays down (Galatians 3:11). Obedience is something that flows out of the reality that we have a new nature. When Christ comes into our lives He gives us this new nature. Naturally, just as the orange tree produces oranges because it has the nature of an orange tree, we as Christians will produce good works because we now are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and Christ is living in us. As a result we will naturally have a desire to be baptized, study God's Word, to evangelize, and to be obedient.

The futility of pleasing God for the purpose of gaining merit is further exposed as unbiblical when compared to the teaching found in Romans 8:5-9, which says:

*"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the*

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*Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."*

Here the apostle Paul tells us of two types of people: Those who are said to be according to the flesh, and those said to be according to the Spirit. These two classes represent the nature of the unsaved man and the Christian. Notice what Paul tells us about those who are according to the flesh. He says that they set their minds on the things of the flesh, and because of this, it's hostile toward God. This hostile condition prevents man from subjecting himself to the law of God because he is unable to do so and cannot please God. This fleshly man is then contrasted with the Christian, the man who is according to the Spirit. He sets his mind on the things of the Spirit, therefore experiencing peace with God. Obviously he can please God and surely does.

But how do we know if one is according to the flesh or according to the Spirit? Paul gives us the answer:

*"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone*

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*does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."*

Therefore every true Christian is classified as being "according to the Spirit," because he has been born again and the Spirit of God has taken up residency in him.

If we compare this teaching with what the ICC teaches concerning baptismal regeneration, we'll immediately see the problem and can state it by asking two questions:

- A. "Is baptism something that is pleasing to God?"
- B. "Is baptism a command?"

The answer to both is, "yes!" However, the Bible teaches that without the Spirit, man cannot obey God nor please Him. The teaching of the ICC specifically: "The Holy Spirit is given at baptism," is in conflict with scripture at every turn.



**Answering the So-Called  
Proof Texts**

**Chapter 3**

*"...who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you — not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."*

**1 Peter 3:20-22**

### *Answering the So-Called Proof Text*

The ICC has claimed this verse in an attempt to prove that water baptism is what saves a man. A careful look at the passage will indicate that the apostle Peter intentionally steers us away from such an interpretation by stating: *"Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience — through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."*

There are three important elements that must be taken into consideration:

1. Peter makes it clear that he's not talking merely about baptism by immersion. Baptism by immersion for the unsaved man is no different than taking a bath, no different than, *"the removal of dirt from the flesh."*

2. In contrast to a mere physical washing Peter makes reference to a clean heart. Notice again, *"Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience."* It's the state of a man's heart that God is concerned with. The new believer appeals to God for a clean conscience when he calls upon the Lord for forgiveness and when he seeks to obey what God has commanded of him.

3. Consistent with the Biblical teaching that we are saved through believing the gospel. Peter ties all of this *"through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"* Peter, in verse 18 of this chapter, had just mentioned the other element of the gospel that Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3, was of first importance in, namely Christ's death:

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*"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."*

1 Peter 3:18

Once again we see that a sound interpretation will harmonize all of the scripture.

There is no surprise that in our day there are those who say that salvation does not come from only faith. As ambassadors of Christ, it's important that we understand that not only are we saved through faith, but as well how to refute false teachings.

1 Peter commands us to be ready to give every man an answer for the hope that lies within us with gentleness, meekness and respect, and to enlighten people when they are wrong or have a misunderstanding of what the Bible is saying, especially regarding salvation and the manner in which God saves us, (1 Peter 3:15). We are to defend it as we would defend our very lives!

Having laid down the foundation of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, let's turn our attention to Acts 2:38, which is the flagship verse of the International Church of Christ which they claim teaches regeneration through water baptism:

*"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift*

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they had heard the preaching of Jonah.

Peter is saying in Acts 2:38, "Repent and let each one of you be baptized because the forgiveness of your sins." In other words, when we repent we have a change of mind about who Jesus Christ is. He's saying, "You Jews who crucified Jesus, who placed Him on the cross, repent, have a change of mind because I have just told you who He is, it's the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, He is the Messiah."

When we have a change of mind concerning who Jesus Christ is, at that point we come to faith, and God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter says, "Let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ *for* the forgiveness of your sins. When you repent you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. In effect, be baptized out of obedience *for* what you received - the forgiveness of your sins." Baptism is not a mode for forgiveness, that's ludicrous! It's ridiculous! Baptism is a symbol, an outward expression of the change that has taken place inside. Spiritually, we are baptized into Christ.

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."*

1 Corinthians 12:13

We are submerged, which means, "to dip." The Holy Spirit submerges us in Christ. Likewise, when we go

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forward for baptism, we are submerged in water, symbolizing what has already happened to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's an outward symbol; it's not a mode of salvation. How do we know this? We know because we must take things in their immediate context and then in the context of the book.

In Acts 10, Peter had a vision. Some men came to take him to see Cornelius. Peter sits down and begins to preach to Cornelius:

*"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?' And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."*

Acts 10:44-48

If Luke, the author of Acts, is teaching us in chapter 2 that baptism is the mode by which God forgives, then we have a dilemma when we get to Acts 10. Now, either God changes His way of saving people, or Luke forgot what he wrote. We have to take the Word of God in its context.

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In Acts 10, clearly, Cornelius and the other listeners received the Holy Spirit upon hearing the message that Peter was giving them, which was prior to baptism. It's almost as if God gave us this verse to show that baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation because he says in verse 48:

*"And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."*

They were saved! They had the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* their baptism. How can anyone be mistaken on this point?

In the years that I have been witnessing to the people of the International Church of Christ, I have never heard a response until recently from this gentleman who said:

"In Acts chapter 2 and chapter 10, the giving of the Holy Spirit is described as 'falling on them,' or 'coming upon them.' Acts 10:44 says:

*'While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.'*

There's a difference between *receiving* the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit *falling upon* somebody.

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When the Holy Spirit *falls upon* somebody it's like a sign, it's what happened to the apostles in Acts 1 and 2. The Holy Spirit *fell upon* them while they waited in the upper room."

When I heard this I thought, "How do you refute that? It's so ridiculous and so absurd, how do you refute it? There's a distinction between the Holy Spirit *coming* or *falling upon* somebody, and *receiving* the Holy Spirit?"

I said to the man, "The burden of proof is on you. If you're going to make a distinction between those things you need to show me where it is."

He said, "I am showing you. This is it! If you want to receive the Holy Spirit you have to be baptized, like Peter said. But God, at certain times, allows the Holy Spirit to *come upon* somebody or *fall upon* somebody to accomplish a special purpose. In this case it was the first Gentile that was saved, Cornelius."

I said, "You know what? I'm going to have to study this and get back to you because what you're saying is so ridiculous I don't even know how to respond to it."

I went to my Bible and I began to study the difference between "coming upon," "falling upon" or "receiving."

Acts 8:14-17 says:

*"Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not*

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*yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit."*

Peter uses the word interchangeably - *fallen* and *receiving*. He said that they had prayed to receive the Holy Spirit because it had not yet fallen upon any of them. When they prayed and laid hands upon them, they did receive the Holy Spirit. The words are used synonymously and this is a false distinction.

Taking Acts 2 in contrast to Acts 10, we come up, once again, with the conclusion that baptism is not a mode or a way that God forgives us of our sins. It is in fact, something that we do in response to salvation. Something that we do in response to what God has done in us.

We must approach the Book of Acts with the perspective that the author, Luke, will not contradict himself. If he said in Acts 2 that we must be baptized for our salvation, surely the book would carry that same theme all the way through. But we find in Acts 10:46 that Cornelius, upon hearing the words of Peter, was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon him. In doing so, he was given the gift of tongues and began to speak in tongues as a sign to Peter that he, as a representative of the Gentiles, had received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost. As a result, Peter said, "What keeps them from being baptized?" The answer was, nothing! So, Peter and the



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rest of the group baptized these Gentiles and they became the first Gentile Christians.

We know in Acts 10 that there were Christians who were baptized with the Holy Spirit before they were water baptized, and just from that verse alone we know that there are times in the Bible when men were not water baptized before receiving the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8 we have the opposite scenario. There were those who were baptized but did not receive the Holy Spirit.

Taking these verses and placing them together, we conclude that what Peter is saying is not that we must be baptized so that we can receive forgiveness of sins but we should be baptized because we *have* received forgiveness of our sins.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, the apostle Paul makes an interesting statement:

*"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. "*

Here, Paul makes a distinction between the gospel and baptism. He said, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." If we're going to say that salvation is dependent upon our water baptism, then this would be part of the gospel, part of the good news. If Peter stood up on the Day of Pentecost and said, "You must be baptized in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," that would have been as much the gospel

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as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ — it would have been just as important.

It's interesting that the ICC teaches that *it is* part of the gospel, that *it is* part of the good news. But Paul is the one who made the distinction between baptism and the gospel. He said that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the Cross of Christ should be made void. Paul is simply saying, "Hey, I didn't come to baptize, I came to preach the gospel." It's the gospel (according to 1 Corinthians 15) by which we stand; it's the gospel that we receive, it's the gospel by which we are saved.

We know that water baptism, according to this scripture, is not part of the gospel, yet it's separate and distinct. As we study the Bible as a whole, we see that it is the first step of obedience for the new believer. It's a response to what God has done. It's an outward picture of the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit.

There are at least two baptisms. But, how could this be if Ephesians says that there is only one baptism? In Acts 1:5, as Jesus is briefing his apostles before He leaves, He makes a very interesting statement to them:

*"For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

John baptized with water. John's baptism was a bap-

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tism of repentance in that John was preparing the way for the Messiah. Those who came out to hear him preach were baptized as a result of repentance,

Jesus mentioned two baptisms, water baptism — baptism of repentance, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a synonymous term for the "*indwelling*" of the Holy Spirit. When we come to a point in faith, in belief, the Bible teaches us that we receive the *gift* of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 1:13 that His Spirit is a down payment, just as we might make a down payment on a car, His Spirit is a pledge or a down payment that seals us unto God. This is a down payment. We are now His possessions; it's a pledge, a promise to us that we are His children. The Book of Romans tells us that *His* spirit bears witness with *our* spirit. We *are* the children of God! (Romans 8:16)

There is a distinction between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the biggest mistake is that people confuse these two, and in some cases they try and make passages that speak of the baptism of the Holy Spirit refer only to water baptism.

*"Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the*

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*kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?'*  
*Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"*

John 3:1-7

There are people, namely the ICC, who take this passage and say, "Aw ha! You see, Jesus says that you must be born of water and of Spirit." Water baptism! There you have it, right there! How do you get around it?" But if we take a closer look, it may appear that this is what Jesus is talking about on the surface, but then we'll see that Jesus is talking about something much different. We see that Jesus begins to teach Nicodemus about what it's going to take to enter the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus is confused:

*"How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he? "*

John 3:4

Nicodemus, in his naturalistic thinking is saying, "Wait a minute, Jesus, born again? How can I enter into

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my mother's womb? I'm an old man and my mother's even older." Nicodemus is thinking in physical, fleshy terms. He's confused. Jesus is speaking Spiritual Words to him. Jesus is speaking Words of Life. Nicodemus wants to digest it through his physical filter thinking that Jesus is talking about crawling into his mother's womb when Jesus says, "born again." Jesus responds to his misunderstanding by saying:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*  
John 3:5

Then Jesus does something very interesting. He takes the naturalistic thinking - the physical, fleshy thinking of Nicodemus and He contrasts it to the spiritual teaching. He says:

*"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."*  
John 3:6

"Nicodemus, you see, that which is born physically is physical - fleshly. That which is born of the Spirit is Spiritual." Jesus is contrasting the two. Then He says:

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*"Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"*  
John 3:7

He's saying, "Look, you're thinking physical, I'm talking spiritual. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit, that which is born of flesh is flesh."

When we are interpreting scripture, one of the primary rules of sound interpretation is audience relevance. How did the original audience understand the words that are being spoken? If it could be proven that Nicodemus had no way of understanding "water" in reference to natural birth, we would be led to seek a clearer interpretation.

There is another apparent problem that seems to be unavoidable. Jesus tells Nicodemus that as the teacher of Israel he should know these things. Know what things? The things that Jesus has been teaching him. This can be raised as an additional objection to the interpretation of natural birth. The objection would go something like this:

"Not only did Nicodemus not understand water to be natural birth, but if water was referring to natural birth, then why would Jesus suggest that this knowledge is something that the teacher of Israel should be familiar?"

As the teacher of Israel, what would Nicodemus

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have access to that would make him more qualified to understand the words of Jesus? The obvious answer is, the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, revealed to the people of God that there was a time coming in which God would wash them with water and place His Spirit within them.

*"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Jesus' allusion to water and His Spirit in the same sentence would instantaneously take Nicodemus back to this Old Testament prophecy. Therefore, Nicodemus would conclude that Jesus was making reference to the administration of the New Covenant, which the Messiah was now there to inaugurate.

*"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*

Mark 16:16

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The ICC takes this verse and says, "You see, 'He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelief shall not be condemned.'"

If baptism, from what we have seen so far, is the first step of obedience for the new believer, then those who believe will be baptized. Therefore, those who believe and are baptized will be saved. It's not saying that your salvation is based on your baptism, but that your salvation is based on your belief. The next part of the verse says, "*But he who has disbelief shall be condemned.*" We see two groups of people here, those who believe and are baptized, and those who disbelief. What about those who believe and are not baptized - like the thief on the cross, for example? This verse doesn't address that category of people. Why mention baptism when it's not something an unbeliever would do? Baptism is something that believers do.

*"For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, **calling on His name.** It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance."*

Acts 22:15-17

The ICC takes Acts 22:16 and says, "See, he's commanded to arise and be baptized and in doing so he washes away his sins."



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We know that being baptized does not wash your sins away - that is unbiblical. We know that our sins are not washed away based on anything that we do ourselves, we're simply called to have faith in Christ and believe the gospel. One of the products of our faith is the desire to call upon the Lord to ask for forgiveness of our sins.

*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

1 John 1:9

This verse says nothing about being baptized! In confessing our sins, we're acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord. I believe that in Acts 22:16, "*washing away your sins*" is not primarily connected to being baptized, but is primarily connected to calling on His name.

*"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Romans 10:9

Acts 22:16 is saying that Paul was told to get up and be baptized, "*wash away your sins, calling on His*

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*name.*" When we call upon the name of the Lord, when we ask Him to forgive us, acknowledge who He is, our sins are washed away and then water baptism is the first step and response to the new life that God has given them. It's an outward expression of the inward experience.

*"It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men."*  
Acts 19:1-7

The ICC says, "You see, these guys were already baptized, but they didn't know about the baptism of repentance that Peter talked about in Acts 2:38. Paul comes to them and explains that you have to be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit. When they're baptized,

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according to the baptism that Peter preached about in Acts 2:38, Paul lays his hands on them and they receive the Holy Spirit."

The problem with this interpretation is that as Paul is talking with them, he asks, "Into what were you baptized?" They answered, "We were baptized by John." Paul said, "That's the baptism of repentance." Most likely, these men were in the region of the Jordan River and were baptized by John, which was the baptism of repentance. They went on their way to Ephesus, which is in an entirely different region. The death, burial and the resurrection of Christ took place, which they really had no knowledge of, but they had been baptized and went home. Paul meets these men while traveling through Ephesus. He sees that they have no understanding that there even is a Holy Spirit. This tells us that these men knew nothing of Pentecost because anyone that knew anything about Pentecost would have known that there is a Holy Spirit. It also tells us that they didn't know anything about the conversion of the Gentiles because the Gentiles had received the gift of the Holy Spirit as well. Most likely they went home to Ephesus with no understanding of the most basic elements of the gospel that are necessary for belief unto salvation.

If these men had been baptized with the formula that the Lord gave the apostles to be baptized - "*Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" - these men would have surely known that there is a Holy Spirit, but they didn't!

Those who hold strongly that all of these verses

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teach baptismal regeneration are going to disagree with my interpretation and conclusions. But the question that must be posed is, "which interpretation is in harmony with all of the scriptures?" It's one thing to object to an interpretation, but quite another to offer a more consistent interpretation. The ICC objects but offers no harmony of interpretation. This will always be the case until ones eyes are opened to the truth by the Spirit of God.

*"The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The Lord has  
made both of them."  
Proverbs 20:12*

# **The Significance of Christian Baptism**

## **Chapter 4**

There seems to be two extremes concerning baptism. On the one hand we see the ICC's position of baptismal regeneration as unbiblical and an over emphasis on the meaning and design of baptism. On the other hand we see a devaluation of Christian baptism among many professing denominations and churches. The Bible is clear concerning the importance

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and significance of Christian baptism.

The New Testament opens with the historical account of God's prophet, John the Baptist:

*"Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, 'THE VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."*

Matthew 1:1-6

Instantly we are introduced to the baptism of repentance that John was preaching in the wilderness. This is the first mention of baptism in the Bible and is significant for us to understand. John was calling the nation of Israel to repentance - to literally come out and take a bath. It was only those who showed repentance through the confession of their sins that were considered to be the proper subjects of baptism. Although this is the first time that baptism is mentioned in the Bible, it's not the first time that the followers of God were called to take a "bath."

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The Old Testament mentions ceremonial washings. This becomes significant and foundational for a proper understanding of baptism. For example, the priests of God were called to bathe so that they would be considered ceremonially clean, thus fit for the service of God.

*"He shall bathe his body with water in a holy place and put on his clothes, and come forth and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people. Then he shall offer up in smoke the fat of the sin offering on the altar. The one who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water; then afterward he shall come into the camp. But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire. Then the one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water, then afterward he shall come into the camp."*

Leviticus 16:24-28

This becomes rather interesting when we get to the gospel of John. John 3 tells of a special discussion concerning this issue:

*"John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim,*

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*because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized for John had not yet been thrown into prison. Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him.'*"

John 3:23-25

Although we do not know what that conversation consisted, we cannot dismiss the association in the mind of the Jew between John's baptism and Old Testament purification. This will prove to be the key to a proper understanding of "New Covenant" baptism.

In addition to the law concerning ceremonial washings we have the "washing" theme throughout the Old Testament. For example, Psalm 51:7:

*"Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; **Wash me**, and I shall be whiter than snow."*

In the midst of the prophet Ezekiel's language concerning the New Covenant, he says in Ezekiel 36:25-27:

*"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you*



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*will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."*

Ezekiel ties the promise of washing to a time in which the Holy Spirit would be poured out in such a way that He would reside within the people of God.

When we come to the New Testament we find the same tie between the "washing" theme and the gift of the Holy Spirit:

*"Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

1 Corinthians 6:11

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."*

Ephesians 5:25-26

*"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing*

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*by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly  
through Jesus Christ our Savior."*

Titus 3:5-6

When we reference Old Testament background with the baptism of John we see a definite connection. We learn that the outward washing, which is baptism, points to the inward washing of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, this is consistent with the revelation of John the Baptist when he said:

*"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance,  
but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I  
am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you  
with the Holy Spirit and fire."*

Matthew 3:11

Jesus also confirms this parallel as He's giving His disciples instructions concerning Pentecost when He says:

*"Gathering them together, He commanded them not  
to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had  
promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me;  
for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized  
with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

Acts 1:4-5

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The next question that comes to mind is the connection between the baptism of John and the baptism of Jesus' disciples. Are they the same baptism? Primarily, we find no evidence in the Gospels of a command for re-baptism among those who had an accurate knowledge of the Gospel. Some would suggest that Acts 19 teaches a distinction, but this is a misinterpretation of these verses. A closer look will indicate that although John had baptized these men with the baptism of repentance, they were devoid of the knowledge of the gospel:

*"He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. "*

Acts 19:2-5

It is abundantly obvious from this text that these disciples were not familiar with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Immediately after the resurrection, Christ gave His disciples instructions to baptize in the name of the Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They most likely left the region after com-

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ing into contact with John's baptism and had insufficient knowledge of salvation. Merely familiar with the preparatory work of John, they had no knowledge of the substance to which John pointed.

These verses also teach that there is a saving knowledge, which is a prerequisite of the disciple's baptism. This is why Paul had them re-baptized after he thoroughly explained the gospel.

This element of saving faith and repentance is clear throughout the Book of Acts. It was only those who had received the Word were baptized on the day of Pentecost.

*"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls."*

Acts 2:41

John, the Old Testament prophet, called the nation of Israel to repentance by taking a bath in the Jordan River. At the same time he pointed people to a greater reality, the baptism of fire. Concurrently, Jesus' disciples began baptizing followers of Christ. Jesus also points out that there was a greater reality that is coming at Pentecost. We see that the sign of water baptism signifies the spiritual reality of the inward work and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Hebrews says that under the old covenant, there were many sacrifices, many priests and

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many washings. In the new covenant there is one sacrifice for sin, one high priest, and one washing - water baptism.

*"And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."*

Hebrews 10:21-22

Here, the Word of God combines both elements - the inward washing of the Holy Spirit and the outward washing of water baptism.

It is not uncommon for the language concerning the relationship between the sign and the object that it signifies to be used interchangeably - we see this example in the Lord's Supper:

*"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'"*

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

As Jesus is handing them the bread, He calls it His

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body - which was to symbolize His body. The very object that is intended to be the symbol is used interchangeably with that which it is intended to symbolize.

The same can be said of baptism. Although we know that we are saved by grace through faith, we can always look back at our baptism as a visible point when reality was manifest publicly. The apostles would have thought it inconceivable that someone would be baptized that was not truly saved, or truly saved and not baptized! Therefore they could and did use the two interchangeably.

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"*

Romans 6:1-3

A classic example of this is found in Galatians 3:27:

*"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*

Is Paul speaking of water baptism or the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

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*"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ  
Jesus."*

Galatians 3:26

It is clear from the context, Paul is not teaching baptismal regeneration, however, there is a sense in which he could point them back to their water baptism as a confirmation of the reality that they were in Christ. This is the most important point. To confuse this principle of interpretation is to confuse the apostle's true intention and meaning.

Baptism is for believers who repent and are trusting in Christ. Baptism can be regarded as the initiation of the Christian into the visible church.

## **Answering Common Objections**

### **Chapter 5**

#### **Objection #1**

*"The Bible teaches that man is justified by works and faith. \**

*"You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."*  
James 2:24

This is a classic example that shows the importance



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of harmonizing our interpretation of individual verses with the Bible as a whole. The ICC doesn't believe that the Bible contradicts itself, but yet they quote James 2:24 to try to argue that we are saved by "works" as well as faith. The key to understanding what James means is going to be found by comparing scripture with scripture. What's interesting about James chapter 2 is that James uses Abraham as an example in showing the relationship between faith in works. Likewise, when the apostle Paul wants to prove that we are saved by faith, he also appeals to Abraham as an example.

*"What then shall we say that Abraham, our  
forefather according to the flesh, has found?  
For if Abraham was justified by works, he has  
something to boast about, but not **before God**. For  
what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED  
GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS  
RIGHTEOUSNESS.'" Now to the one who works, his  
wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But  
to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who  
justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as  
righteousness,"*  
Romans 4:1-5

In order to understand the Bible's teaching on justification as it pertains to both of these verses, we must have knowledge of the events that took place in the life of Abraham. When Paul uses Abraham to make his

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point, that man is justified by faith, he appeals to Genesis chapter 15. It was in Genesis 15 that God came to Abraham and promised that he would bless him with a seed. Abraham believed God's promise, and Paul says, "*It was credited to him as righteousness.*"

Paul goes on to show that it is the man who does not work, but believes in God who justifies the ungodly, it is that man whose faith is credited as righteousness. The context of Romans chapter 4:1-5 is also concerning Abraham standing "*before God*". This is a significant point because James discusses man's justification - not before God, but before man. So Paul clearly teaches that Abraham was justified by faith.

When we come to James chapter 2, James is going to draw on an event in the life of Abraham that takes place many years after the instance that Paul referred to. James appeals to the day in which Isaac was taken up on the mountain by his father, Abraham. Again, if Abraham were a justified man before Isaac was born, then we would expect to see Abraham with a desire to be obedient to what God commanded. This happens to be the point that James is making. James is arguing against a form of "easy believism."

*"You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say."*

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James 2:17-19

James is not referring to our appearance or our standing before God, but before man. He says in verse 18 *"Show me your faith without works and I will show you my faith by my works."* The bottom line is that James does not contradict Paul. Abraham was justified by faith and then demonstrated his faith by being obedient to what God commanded. A Christian is justified by faith and it is baptized in water out of obedience to God's command.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

Ephesians 2:8-10

**Objection #2**

***"If you say that we are saved by nothing we do, then how can it be that someone is saved by repeating the sinners prayer?"***

I personally don't believe that man is saved because he walks the aisle during an altar call, or because he repeats a prayer. A careful examination of the Bible

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will find no such teaching in scripture. However, we are promised salvation, should we call upon the Lord!

*"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*

*For the Scripture says, 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

Romans 10:9-13

If we look at this verse closely we will see that Paul inverts the order between the mouth and the heart. He first states that if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, you will be saved. He then inverts the order and says that belief is something that takes place in the heart, which then causes the mouth to confess that Jesus as Lord. Our confession of faith and our calling upon Jesus with our mouth is a response to the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

**Objection #3**

*"Your definition of grace leads people to live sinful*

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*lives.'*

An abuse of a doctrine does not have any bearing on its validity or truthfulness. When a man comes into a saving knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and the reality that he condescended to this earth and died in the place of sinners that man would be changed, that man will have a desire to honor God and live a holy life. That man has been made a new creature in Christ Jesus and as such, his life will be characterized by the pursuit of righteousness. Anything less than a desire to please God is the type of faith that James is calling into question in chapter 2 of his letter.

**Objection #4**

***"Baptism is not a work."***

From time to time I have people tell me that they believe that were saved by grace through faith and the misunderstanding is that baptism is not a work. It should be obvious that anything that Christ commands is by nature a law. If Christ commands the believer to be baptized, then believer is under obligation to obey Christ's command. Furthermore, Jesus himself clearly identified baptism as a work of righteousness:

*"Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.*

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*But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him."*

Matthew 3:13-15

2 Timothy 1:7-9 says:

*"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us 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."*

**"Chances are you picked up this book because you have been a member of the International Church of Christ (ICC), or you have known someone who belongs to this movement. Whatever the case, I do not believe anything happens by chance. It is the providence of God according to His plan that you will be exposed to the material contained in this book.**

**If you are currently a member of the ICC, I challenge you as a professing Christian to examine the claims in this book and compare them with the Bible. It is my desire and prayer that you would abandon this movement and come to a proper understanding of salvation."**



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