
The Church of Christ or Salvation By Baptism

I HAVE BEEN ASKED BY SEVERAL FOLKS TO WRITE ON THE CHURCH OF CHRIST. This is not to be confused with the United Church of Christ, which is the relatively new name of the Congregationalists. The people I am referring to are often known as “Campbellites” after one of the founders. Other names include The Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, Disciples, etc. It started in Pennsylvania and quickly moved to Ohio, Kentucky and the Southwest. Today there are a great many in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and that general region. There are many Church of Christ young people in the greater Boston area; I have heard that as many as 2,000 meet for Sunday services at the Boston Garden.

A LITTLE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT. It all began in the early 1800’s with four men who were Presbyterian: Charles Campbell, his son Alexander, Walter Scott, and Barton Stone. It started with a call for the union of all Christians. This was about 1809. Of course, the unity bit did not go over and the “Presbyterians” who had come to “see the light” about baptism by immersion joined the Baptists. It did not take too long for the “Campbellites” to leave that association believing the Baptists to be too Calvinistic. As we shall see a little later, these people believe that it is possible to be saved and then lost and they place an unscriptural emphasis on free will. So, around the 1820’s, they formed their own group, calling themselves “Reformers” at first and then later used the terms “Christian” or “Disciples”. Like many others before them (Mary Baker Eddy, Charles Russell, Joseph Smith, Ellen White, etc.), they claimed that they had recovered the truth which had been lost for many centuries.

SALVATION BY BAPTISM. This false doctrine certainly did not have to be rediscovered, for multitudes have believed it since the early centuries of the Church when error replaced the truth in most places. This is the cardinal doctrine upon which this heretical system is founded. Unless you are baptized you cannot be saved and indeed, baptism is equated with salvation. Alexander Campbell, in “The Millennial Harbinger ‘Extra’”, wrote: “The only time the word regeneration occurs in the New Testament, with reference to a personal change, it means, or is equivalent to,

immersion. Regeneration and immersion are, therefore, two names for the same thing...being born again and being immersed are the same thing.” Now language could not be more plain than that – according to them, one is saved and has his sins forgiven merely by being baptized by immersion. As I mentioned, these are not the first ones to teach that water washes away one’s sins. The Mormons teach it, so do Roman Catholics (infant baptism removes original sin), and many others believe along the same lines. Alexander Campbell, in “Memoirs” Vol. II, page 84, says: “Thus in 1823, the design of baptism was fully understood and publicly asserted.”

SALVATION BY WATER IS AN ABSURDITY. Any honest study of the Word of God will reveal that it is silly to think that one’s sins can be removed by a mere ritual, that of having oneself put in water. Baptism certainly is a work, something that one does himself, and God says salvation is “NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANY MAN SHOULD BOAST.” I cannot deal here with all of the texts they wrest out of context, but will deal with their favorite and foremost verse of Scripture, Acts 2:38: “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.” There are a number of rules (they are but common sense and are, in fact, found in Scripture) if one is going to “RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE WORD OF TRUTH” and come to a proper understanding. One is called The Analogy of Faith. That simply means that all Scripture on a subject must be considered when considering any doctrine. Rarely, if ever, does one text expound all the truth on a particular subject. Another rule is that of Context; what is the particular passage dealing with. For example, when people use Scripture to show that a saved person can be lost, they invariably ignore the context. There are many passages which reveal that one who is saved can lose his reward, but not his soul. Apply the areas relating to reward to the soul, and presto, they say a saved man can be lost.

DOES ACTS 2:38 (OR ANY SCRIPTURE) TEACH SALVATION BY BAPTISM? You must keep in mind that Peter was speaking to Jews, most if not all of whom had been there for the crucifixion of Christ. He

The Church of Christ or Salvation By Baptism

- 2 -

has squarely placed the blame on them. Christ was considered a heretic, worthy of death, as were his followers. To become a part of this group was to lay everything on the line. They needed to repent, "change their minds", which also involves faith. This is the saving act. Jesus said, "EXCEPT YE REPENT, YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH." He didn't say, "Except ye be baptized..." Baptism was the outward profession and testimony that they had repented. You can't see repentance, but you can see the fruit of it—what it produces. Why is it in Acts 3:19, when Peter is again preaching to Jews, baptism is not even mentioned. "REPENT YE THEREFORE, AND BE CONVERTED, THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE BLOTTED OUT..." Didn't these Jews need to be baptized? **NOT FOR SALVATION.** Once we receive Christ as Savior, then, to be obedient to Him, we profess our faith in the waters of baptism. The plain truth is that, like many other religious people (many of whom use the Bible), these people are not really saved. Scripture says, "For by grace are ye saved...it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8-9) It is all of God and there is no work we can perform to produce it. "WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." Is that true or is it not true? Well, if it is true, then one does not have to be baptized to be saved. Now, we believe in baptism, after one is saved.

OTHER HERESIES OF THE CAMPBELLITES. I will only take time to mention a few of their other false doctrines. As I mentioned, they believe that a saved person can be lost. If he does not continue in their appointed teachings or if he sins or falls away, he is lost once again. Because all false systems depend on some kind of works to be saved, it is only logical to them to say you are lost if you do not continue to perform their works. **GOD'S PLAN IS PURE GRACE. UNSAVED MAN CANNOT FATHOM THAT AND SIMPLY MUST ADD WORKS.** In a book by Bob L. Ross, "Acts 2:38 and Baptismal Regeneration", the author quotes a current follower of this doctrine: "The one being baptized must understand that baptism is essential to his salvation from past sins..." According to this sect, you must save yourself by baptism and then you must keep yourself saved. Again, like all false systems, this is not salvation, but probation. One of their tracts, "Some Facts About the New Testament Church" says, "Baptism isn't worth a

dime to the one who has 'fallen out of grace'." Of course, these people cannot fall out of grace, for they were never in it in the first place. In order to promote heresy, one must be pretty good at explaining away a number of Biblical doctrines, for they all dovetail together. To show you how far they will go to promote the basis of their false teaching, another Campbellite, T. W. Brents, wrote a book entitled "The Gospel Plan of Salvation". In it he said, "Then if there are some things which God cannot do though omnipotent (think that through), may there not be some things He did not know, though omniscient?" He also wrote, "God had power to avoid the foreknowledge of everything incompatible with His attributes and scheme of salvation." Well, God is not a schemer, but they sure are, like all who hold to doctrines which are not taught in the Word of God when it is "RIGHTLY DIVIDED."

THE REAL PROBLEM WITH CAMPBELLITES.

The real problem is that they are not truly converted. They are not saved, for they do not have a true Biblical basis for their hope. They are like many other religious people; **THEY HAVE ONLY AN INTELLECTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST AS THE SON OF GOD.** They give a mental assent to certain truths, but because they are not in fact born again, they do not understand God's Word. That is why they, and many others like them, twist and redefine Bible doctrines to suit their own ideas. The world is full of this today. There never has been a time when so many people talked about the Bible, but few have any serious commitment to it. It is my conviction that all the modern versions have helped promote this situation. If you don't like what the true Word of God says it is easy enough to find one that suits your fancy. Baptismal regeneration is an old heresy and one which has deceived millions upon millions. When someone explains the Scripture, and he must add, twist, subtract, or do something else to it to get his doctrine, you may be sure that he is unsound. The Scripture is plain enough to those who are saved; but those who are not born again cannot understand it no matter what they do (I Corinthians 2:14). **BUT THE NATURAL MAN RECEIVETH NOT THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD: FOR THEY ARE FOOLISHNESS UNTO HIM: NEITHER CAN HE KNOW THEM, BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED.**

The **CORNERSTONE CHALLENGE**

March 1987

www.cornerstonebaptistmetrobooston.org

CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH

P.O. BOX 438, BELMONT, MA 02478

Rolland C. Starr, Pastor