

Baptism in the New Testament

The Holy Spirit and Water Baptism in Acts by Andrew Das

I want to thank all of you for inviting me to speak to you on the topic of baptism in the New Testament. My thinking about this topic began several years ago when I was in college at DePauw in Indiana. At the time I was seriously dating a young Pentecostal lady. (Of course, this was long before I met the beautiful wife that Lord had in store for me. When it comes to the Lord's planning, these things always seem to be clearer in hindsight.)

Anyway, to get back to our story, as a Lutheran and a Pentecostal you might have guessed that our worship traditions were certainly different. My service had the liturgy; hers had the praise music. People stayed within the pews at my church; they danced in hers. My pastor talked at length about our salvation in Christ; hers about the nitty gritty of daily Christian living (salvation in Christ was sort of assumed, except of course when they offered an opportunity for people to come forward to accept Jesus as their Savior).

So you can imagine, then, how, even though we were both Christians, we were worlds apart. What were we to do? When we first met we went around and around about what is called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." It's one thing to be baptized in water and saved. It's quite another to receive the full empowerment of the Holy Spirit that comes in this subsequent experience, manifested initially by tongues. Her favorite proof texts for this subsequent experience were in Acts. I began to study more about this topic and in the process discovered a very rich understanding not of a subsequent experience in Acts but of water baptism itself. Water baptism forms an important motif that runs all through the book of Acts, and it's in association with baptism that we find some really remarkable promises. To begin our study of baptism, I could think of no better starting point.

I. Acts 2:38

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, a large audience congregated around to witness this amazing phenomenon of people, the disciples, speaking in "tongues." Luke doesn't assume that we know what this is all about. He carefully defines the phenomenon for his readers. He explains that the apostles were supernaturally enabled to speak not in random sounds or gibberish but in actual human languages that could be understood by various onlookers. Luke tells in Acts 2 about all the various language groups, and even dialects, that were represented among the listeners. In the midst of this amazing display, Peter gets up to address the people. He gives a sermon explaining the significance of Jesus Christ. And at the climax of this sermon Peter indicts the people. In 2:36 this Jesus is the one "YOU have crucified." The people were cut to the heart. They were convicted. So they ask Peter and the rest of the Apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replies in Act 2:38: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. That day about three thousand people were baptized. This is Luke's first mention of water baptism in the Book of Acts. And really, it's programmatic for Luke.

First, Luke firmly connects baptism and the forgiveness of sins. When the people are cut to the heart and convicted that they are responsible for the death of their own Messiah, when they're convicted of their sin, they seek forgiveness. The solution for sin is not just to repent. It's not just to "accept" Jesus. Rather, it is to repent and be baptized.

Both imperatives, repentance and being baptized, are modified by "for the forgiveness of sins." Baptism is a crucial part of the solution to the problem posed by sin. "Repent" is a second person plural imperative. But "be baptized" is a third person singular imperative. Plural and second vs. singular and third. What's the significance of this? Throughout the Greek Old Testament, second and third person imperatives are often combined. And why is this? Using the third person singular imperative (in our case, "be baptized") after a second person plural (in our case, "repent") permits the speaker to address the members of the group individually. This interesting variation doubly emphasizes that the third person imperative ("be baptized") applies to every member of the group. That means that everyone must be baptized if they are to receive the forgiveness of sins. It is necessary in order to receive forgiveness. [See Osburn; and Exod. 16:29; Josh. 6:10; 2 Kings 10:19; Zech. 7:10; 1 Macc. 10:63; Didache 15:3; Ignatius, Magnesians 6:2.] Now one can only imagine the implications of this for the infants and children in the crowd at Pentecost. But we'll come back to that point more later.

Let me turn to another aspect of Acts 2:38. Many of our Reformed brethren do not want to admit that water baptism conveys forgiveness. So when they work with this text they contend that the Greek preposition used in the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" does not mean "for" but "because of the forgiveness of sin." In other words, the Reformed suggest that the Pentecost crowd should be baptized BECAUSE they had received the forgiveness of sins. Baptism was to be a SIGN of forgiveness and not a means of conveying forgiveness. But the problem is that the Greek word in question never means "because." For those of you who've been able to keep up a little with your Greek since seminary, it's the preposition "ace" or "ice," depending on who taught you Greek. What I find interesting is that Baptist authors when they're writing Greek grammars always have one and only one example of this preposition meaning "because": Acts 2:38. Sounds suspicious, doesn't it?

Let me give you a revealing parallel. In Matt. 26:28, Jesus uses the same preposition at the Last Supper: "... this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many FOR the forgiveness of sins." So is Jesus' blood poured out "because of" the forgiveness of sins, or is Jesus' blood poured out "for" the forgiveness of sins? I'll let you draw your own conclusions with respect to Acts 2:38. In fact, even the repentance mentioned in Acts 2:38's "repent and be baptized" probably should be taken and understood alongside

baptism. This is not some long, drawn-out inner process. Paul uses a tense that expresses once-for-all action. Repentance therefore manifests itself in baptism.

Acts 2:38 doesn't stop with forgiveness, though. It goes on. This entire Pentecost phenomenon began with the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had come down upon the apostles and given them the gift of foreign languages. When Peter addresses the amazed onlookers, he explains that that day was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that the Spirit would be poured out. There's another very similar prophecy that I think sheds light on Acts 2. Ezekiel 36:24-27 prophesies a future day when the Lord would sprinkle water upon His people and cleanse them from their impurities, their sin, and put a new Spirit in them. As in Ezekiel, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit are connected and related to water, in this case water baptism. And did you notice how the Spirit is simply promised to all who are baptized. There are no conditions attached. It's simply a promise of God. There is no second or subsequent stage in the Christian life. Christians are all to be granted the Holy Spirit. There's no such thing as a "have-not" Christian.

Acts provides ample evidence that the people DO receive the gift of the Spirit. Luke does not narrate a mass phenomenon of 3,000 people speaking in tongues. Rather, what Luke describes is a Spirit-filled community that came together for the breaking of bread, the apostles' teaching, fellowship and prayer. The early believers held all things in common. Actually, all throughout Luke's Gospel and Acts, how you use your possessions is a sign of your inner condition and status before God. One need only turn the page to watch what happens with Ananias and Sapphira, as opposed to Barnabas, to see this motif in action, or even the selection of the seven deacons in Acts 6 who are to handle the distribution of the community goods. Handling community goods and possessions will translate into something very different in the narrative, as you'll see when you follow the stories of two of them: Philip and Stephen. And that's because the handling of possessions are always signs of something more for Luke. So when the community shared all things in common, we have Luke's signal about a miraculously new and changed condition in the lives of these believers.

To conclude our discussion of Acts 2:38. This is the first reference to baptism in the Book of Acts. Luke explains that the one who is convicted by sin should repent and be baptized. Baptism, alongside repentance, brings about both the forgiveness of sins and conveys the promised Spirit. Let us now turn to the rest of Acts to see if what Luke has to say there is consistent with the initial description in Acts 2:38.

II. Acts 8:26-40

We'll skip for the moment Acts 8:1-25 and go straight to Acts 8:26-40. After his work in Samaria, Philip is directed to go to the Gaza road. He comes across an Ethiopian eunuch reading from the text of Isaiah. The eunuch invites him up into the chariot and inquires as to the meaning of the text. Philip explains that Isaiah was writing about Jesus. When the two come across some water, the eunuch asks to be baptized in v. 36. Now nowhere in the text up to this point has the subject of baptism come up. Philip must have discussed baptism with the eunuch to motivate this request. And the text says nothing about repentance, just baptism. While the Spirit initiated this encounter, nowhere does the text say that the eunuch received the Spirit. The eunuch was simply baptized. But at precisely the point where we would expect, according to Acts 2:38, to hear that the eunuch received the Spirit, we read of the Spirit snatching Philip away. The Spirit does make an appearance in the narrative. The next verse then says that the eunuch "went on his way rejoicing." That Luke describes the eunuch rejoicing may be his nod to the reader that the Spirit was received. Look at Acts 13:52. The disciples were filled with "joy and the Holy Spirit." Joy and the Spirit are closely related throughout Acts.

The Philippian jailer will also rejoice after his conversion in 16:34.

III. Acts 9:17-18

The next passage that talks about water baptism is Acts 9 at Saul's conversion.

Ananias comes to Saul and lays hands on him. After laying hands on him, Ananias says that the Lord had sent him in order that (hopos) "you might see and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Verse 18 IN ONE SENTENCE says that "immediately" it was as if scales fell from Paul's eyes, and he could see again; he arose, was baptized and ate.

The Holy Spirit restores Paul's sight and the first thing he does is to arise and get baptized. Only then does he eat after his fast. Acts 22:16, when recounting Paul's baptism again, likewise notes the haste of Saul's baptism. As you can see, the Spirit and water baptism are closely related in this passage.

IV. Acts 10:44-48; Acts 11:13-18

In Acts 10 Peter comes to Cornelius' household under the directions of the Spirit, a story recounted by Peter again in Acts 11 to the Jerusalem church. Peter came to Cornelius' household in order to announce a message whereby Cornelius' household "will be saved" (11:14). In 10: 43 as Peter preached Jesus Christ to the members of Cornelius' household, he was in the process of saying that whoever believes in Jesus' name would be saved and would receive the forgiveness of sins. According to 10:44 just as he was saying this Holy Spirit came down upon Cornelius and his household. Peter's initial reaction to the reception of the Holy Spirit is that the household NEEDS TO BE BAPTIZED. In 10:47: "Can anyone forbid water that these people should not be baptized which have received the Holy Spirit...?" So in 10:48 Peter COMMANDED (prostasso) water baptism. Peter's reaction shows that water baptism and the Spirit should go together. Since they have received the Holy Spirit, the family should be and are commanded to be baptized. When Peter recalls these events in Acts 11:15-17 he tells in v. 15 of the coming of the Spirit. This coming of the Spirit, Peter then connects to John the Baptist's promise. Where John baptized in water, John had said that the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Gentiles' reception of the Spirit reminded Peter of John the Baptist's prophecy, which subsequently pointed Peter to the need for water baptism. The Spirit's reception by Cornelius' household pointed Peter back to John the Baptist's words about baptism and the Holy Spirit which in turn pointed to the need for water baptism. Do you see the logic? The Spirit leads Peter to John's words about baptism in the Spirit and fire which consequently leads to water baptism itself.

Water baptism and the Spirit are again closely associated. When the Gentiles receive the Spirit, Peter concludes before his Jerusalem audience that who was he to "hinder" (koluein) God. Peter uses the same word "hinder" (koluein) in Acts 11 that he had used in Acts 10:47 in relation to the need for the people to be baptized. Even as no one should hinder baptism, so Peter says that he must not hinder God. To hinder the people from being baptized is to HINDER GOD. It is GOD who is at work in baptism.

V. Acts 19:1-7

Let's turn to Acts 19:1-7. These verses cannot be understood without backing up and looking at 18:24-28. In Acts 18 Apollos was preaching fervently in the Spirit the things of the Lord in the synagogues at Ephesus. However, Priscilla and Aquila take him aside to explain the way of God more carefully. For Apollos only knew the baptism of John. NOTE THAT A PROBLEM IN BAPTISMAL TEACHING IS TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY HERE, such that a preacher who was "fervent in the Spirit" needed to be corrected. The Christian proclamation must include water baptism in Christ's name (18:25; 19:5). Note also that Apollos taught "accurately about Jesus. After all, John the Baptist himself had pointed to the one coming after him. Apollos had clearly learned about Jesus since he taught accurately. While Apollos only knew the baptism of John, that earlier form of baptism had found its completion in Apollos' knowledge of Christ the fulfillment. The Apollos incident forms a striking contrast with Paul's encounter with the Ephesian "disciples" in Acts 19:1-7.

1) Both Apollos and the "disciples" had received the baptism of John.

2) Apollos and the "disciples" are associated with Ephesus.

BUT:

Apollos is described in favorable terms. He is a "learned man" (aner logios) who "spoke boldly" in the synagogues (cf. 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3). He "taught accurately" concerning the "Way" (18:25). After being properly instructed on the matter of baptism, he continues on in his witness and "vigorously" (eutonos) refutes the Jews through the Scriptures. He speaks "by the Spirit." While the disciples in Acts 19 are baptized and receive the Spirit, Priscilla and Aquila see no need to rebaptize Apollos who already preaches BY THE SPIRIT. Apollos' bold preaching echoes the bold preaching of Stephen in Acts 6:10 (who also refuted the Jews from the Scriptures). But the Ephesian "disciples" have not even heard that a Spirit exists. Unlike Apollos who taught accurately the things of the Lord, the Ephesian "disciples" must be shown the true significance EVEN OF JOHN'S BAPTISM, that it was a preparation for the one coming after him, Jesus Christ (19:4). Whereas Apollos had recognized Christ as the fulfillment of John's baptism, not so with the Ephesian "disciples." Paul therefore instructs the Ephesian disciples more accurately in what John the Baptist himself had taught. He teaches them about Christ and the Spirit. So why use the term "disciples"? "Disciples" is a key term for Christian status (see 18:23, 27; 19:9, 30; 20:1, 30; 21:4, 16). These "disciples" ironically do not seem to be very good disciples. They have no idea about the Holy Spirit, a key element in their master's teaching (see John the Baptist in Luke 3:16). Apollos is described as a powerful teacher of the Word and yet is never called a "disciple." This is an instance of Lukan irony. They were hardly disciples of John the Baptist, let alone Jesus. Thus the need to be baptized. In fact, Luke's use of the term "disciples" may even have been a "set up" for the reader when we suddenly learn more about these "disciples" at the same time in the narrative that Paul does! And again, note the close connection between the Spirit and water baptism in this account. The Ephesian "disciples" indicate that they had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. Paul does not question their belief or their previous instruction. His diagnostic question on matters of the Holy Spirit centers on water baptism: "Into what then were you baptized?" (19:3).

Upon learning of their ignorance of the Spirit, Paul finds it necessary to teach about Jesus Christ. Proper teaching concerning Jesus Christ would have included the Holy Spirit and water baptism. For if they had not received the Holy Spirit, then their baptism was at issue. If baptism was at issue, then the very message about Christ was at stake.

Again, even John the Baptist in Luke preached about the one who came after him (Luke 3:16-17).

This likely explains the baptism of the Ephesian "disciples" as opposed to Apollos. They had not even received John's baptism properly. That's the problem. They had not even received John's baptism properly. Contrast their situation with Apollos who had also received John's baptism, and who was preaching by the Spirit about Christ. He did not need to be baptized. We have in these texts a high view of John's baptism even as Luke 3:3 which says that John's baptism brought the forgiveness of sins. These "disciples" did not know of Jesus' Spirit, the very Spirit of which John the Baptist himself had taught. Thus, they did not likely receive even John's baptism properly. Once again, the Holy Spirit is promised with water baptism. A lack of the Spirit leads to the issue of water baptism.

VI. Excursus: The Order of Water Baptism and the Spirit

What about the order of events in these narratives? Shouldn't baptism come first and then the Spirit? Luke clearly establishes a connection between water baptism and the Spirit. In Acts 2:38 the Spirit is promised to those who are baptized. But in Acts 10 Cornelius' household receives the Spirit first and then is baptized. Acts 19 records the "disciples" first being baptized and then receiving the Spirit. Luke does not then seem to be establishing a clear sequence between the events. BUT: note how they are always in the immediate context of the other. The Spirit is simply a promise in connection with baptism in Acts 2:38. It's a lot like John 3:8: you hear the sound of the wind but don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. The two are simply connected.

But what about Acts 8:1-25. This passage presents a problem. In Acts 8 a group of baptized believers remain without the promised Spirit for a significant period of time (the time it took the apostles to arrive after the evangelization was well on its way). Only after the apostles arrive and pray for the people do they receive the Spirit. Does this passage disrupt the connection between water baptism and the Holy Spirit. Not really. One must not overlook certain grammatical features qualifying Acts 8. In v. 16: For [the Spirit] had NOT YET fallen on any of them, but they had ONLY been baptized. The words "not yet" and then "only" are placed first in their respective clauses for emphasis. First, the Spirit had NOT YET fallen on them. An event that was supposed to happen had not yet happened (and thus oudepo and not ou). The distinction between "not yet" and a simple "not" is one of an EXPECTED event that had not. In other words, the Spirit SHOULD HAVE fallen upon them in baptism. The Spirit, then, SHOULD HAVE come

with the Baptism. Now we can understand the emphatic word "ONLY." They were ONLY baptized. The baptism was "ALONE," that is, it was UNACCOMPANIED.

Luke is serving the reader notice that the separation of the Spirit from water baptism was UNUSUAL. The Spirit was therefore NORMALLY RECEIVED IN WATER BAPTISM. Something strange had happened in Samaria. This was not how the Spirit was normally received. So why did the Spirit delay His coming to the Samaritans if they had been baptized? To understand why we must take a look at the role that Samaritans play in Luke and Acts.

VII. The Samaritan Motif in Luke-Acts

To fully appreciate what is going on in Acts 8 we have to recognize that this is not the first time that Luke has told us about the Samaritans. It is Luke who tells us the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. When a man is left for dead by bandits on the side of a road, it is not a Jewish priest or Levite who helps him but a Samaritan.

It is Luke who in 17:11-19 tells the story of ten lepers who are healed by Jesus. Of the ten, only one of them returned to give thanks, a Samaritan. Then at one of the decisive turning points in Luke's gospel, in 9:52 Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, which introduces us to the middle section of Luke's gospel, what has been called the "Travel Narrative" from 9:52-19:27(44?). And it is precisely at this crucial turning point that we find a story about Samaritans. In fact, Luke inserts this story into the narrative of Mark which he had been following up to this point. We will return to this story in a moment.

Then in the second volume of Luke's writings, in Acts 1:8 Samaria is mentioned as one of the pivotal landmarks in the spread of the gospel about Christ. The fulfillment of Acts 1:8 is precisely what is being recorded in Acts 8:1, the passage that we are concerned about. But the Samaritan references do not stop there. The Samaritans are mentioned again in Acts 9:31 and 15:5. While the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John's Gospel fills in some of the background on the hostility and theological differences between Jews and Samaritans, Luke assumes that knowledge of the reader.

When Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem in Luke 9:52, the Samaritans grow hostile toward Jesus.

So who were these Samaritans? First, they were not Gentiles. Jesus sent the ten lepers including a Samaritan to the priest for purification, a requirement in the Law for God's people. Second, in Acts 1:8, Judea AND Samaria are linked. In fact, it is ALL Judea AND Samaria as opposed to the ends of the earth. Likewise, in Acts 9:31, Judea, Galilee and Samaria are lumped together. Samaria is thus a part of Jewish territory and distinct from gentile territory. Third, after the conversion of Cornelius, 10:28 remarks how "unheard of" (athemiton) it is for a Jewish person to unite and get together with a non-Jew (allophulos). There were no such concerns about associating with Samaritans in Acts 8. Finally, it is the Cornelius episode that sparked concern over relations with the gentile uncircumcised and the spread of the gospel in Acts 15:7, 14. The Samaritans were not an issue.

So, while a Samaritan could be called a "foreigner" (allogenes) in Luke 17:18, that does not mean that the Samaritans are the same sort of foreigners as the Gentiles in Luke. But Luke never calls them Jews either. According to Luke 17:18 and Acts 8:9 they are a distinct group of people. In Acts 15:3 a report is sent to Samaria that the Gentiles were converting. The key issue with the Gentiles was circumcision and observance of the Law. Whereas Luke gives a careful apology for Jesus' contact with the Roman centurion in Luke 7:1ff. (the "elders of the Jews" had intervened in 7:3; for the centurion had built a synagogue-7:5), Luke 9:51-56 never apologizes or defends Jesus' presence on Samaritan soil (note how Luke deletes the material in Mark 7:25ff. and Matt. 15:21ff. on the Canaanite woman, and how Jesus avoids direct contact with the Gentiles, but not so the Samaritans in Luke 17:11-19). Thus, the Samaritans are not pagans but simply heterodox in their understanding of the Jewish faith. To move beyond Luke's presentation to the annals of history, there was GREAT HOSTILITY between Jews and Samaritans.

King Omri had established Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel in 878-871 BCE. When the northern kingdom was captured by the Assyrians in 721 BCE, the Assyrians deported much of the population, but not all. Relations between Samaritans and Jews in the time of Ezra to Alexander were not that hostile. The Samaritans accepted Ezra's promulgation of the Pentateuch and Samaritan satraps intermarried with the families of the Jerusalem high priests. Even after Alexander the Great in 331 BC, the hostility did not really emerge just yet. Samaria rebelled against Alexander's government while he was staying in Egypt. One of Alexander's generals reconquered the city, expelled the population and founded a Macedonian military colony on the site of the old royal city. The population of Samaria fled to Shechem and rebuilt that city which had been lying in waste for 400 years. Near Shechem at Mt. Gerizeim, they built their temple.

This in itself was not bad. The Tobiads in Transjordan had a temple. And when the high priest Onias IV was driven out of Jerusalem, he set up his own temple at Leontopolis in Egypt. [But in the time of Ptolemy Philometer in 181-45 BC, Egyptian Jews disputed with the Samaritans over the Temple at Gerizzim. The Jews argued that according to the Law of Moses, the Temple was to be at Jerusalem. In a debate between proponents of the Jerusalem and Gerizzim temples, the Jerusalem defenders prevailed before Philometer.] In fact, the Samaritan Pentateuch closely agrees with the Pentateuch as preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls which reflects the text as it existed in the second century BC. The implication is that there had not yet been a serious split between the Samaritans and the rest of Israel in the second century BC. [They accepted only the Pentateuch and denied the Davidic monarchy. They had strong beliefs in a messianic figure, the taheb, who would restore all things.] In what was the beginning of more serious conflict, when Israel won its independence from its Greek overlords in the mid-second century, one of its Jewish rulers, John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC) destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BCE. 20 years later he laid siege to Samaria and utterly destroyed the entire city, annexing the province to Jerusalem and its religious policies. The hostilities lasted well into the time of Jesus. On one Passover late at night during the time of the Procurator Coponius in 6-9 AD, the Samaritans scattered human bones on the Temple porches and in the sanctuary. In response, the Jews forbade Samaritans access to the Jerusalem Temple. While the Jews might use roads through Samaria to go to Jerusalem for the feasts in the first century, these trips were not without some incredibly bloody incidents. The first century remained a period of extremely hostile relations between Jews and Samaritans. The groups continued to feud over the proper location of the Temple. For this reason, the Jews could hurl the label "Samaritan" at

Jesus as an insult in John 8:48. And the Samaritans were very defensive over the Jerusalem-Gerizzim temple issue as we can see in John 4:20. Josephus attacks the Samaritans for claiming their Jewish heritage only when it would benefit them. Luke 17:18 calls them "foreigners." John's gospel says that the Jews had NO dealings with Samaritans. The Jewish Mishnah says (Sheb. 8.10): "To eat Samaritan bread is to eat the bread of swine."

Into THIS social context comes Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. Into THIS social context, Jesus marvels at a Samaritan leper who returned to give thanks. In THIS context, Luke establishes as a pivotal event the Samaritan conversion in Acts 8. Acts 8 should probably be read alongside Luke 9:52ff. Let me have you keep a finger in both passages. First of all, both incidents are pivotal events in their respective books. In Luke 9:52 Jesus turns His face toward Jerusalem and the travel narrative section begins. In Acts 8 the Samaritan conversion marks the fulfillment of one of the geographical locations mentioned in Acts 1:8 for the expansion of the Gospel. Second, JERUSALEM figures prominently in both accounts. In Luke 9:51 Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem and in Acts 8:14 it is the Jerusalem apostles who come to Samaria. Third, whereas the Samaritans DO NOT RECEIVE (dechomai) Jesus in Luke 9:53, they DO RECEIVE (dechomai) God's Word in Acts 8:14. Finally, the Samaritans do not receive Jesus in Luke 9:53 BECAUSE (hoti) His face was set toward Jerusalem. The Samaritans are hostile toward those heading to Jerusalem. Such people are not welcome.

A similar, extreme ethnic hostility is manifested in Luke 9:54 by James and John. They want to call down fire from heaven against the Samaritans. Jesus has to rebuke them in Luke 9:55 for such a reaction. In Acts 8 John accompanies Peter to Samaria, one of the two who had wanted to call down fire (pur) upon the Samaritans. This time John DOES get to call down fire upon them. Only the "fire" (pur) John calls down turns out ironically to be the fire of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16).

This extreme ethnic hostility that the disciples manifested against the Samaritans and vice versa in the Gospel of Luke, in Luke 10:25-27 and 17:11-10, is certainly a major consideration, then, when we come across another Samaritan incident in Acts. 8. But there is another factor in the interpretation of Acts 8, and that is this whole debate between Jews and Samaritans over their respective temples at Jerusalem and Mt. Gerizzim. Acts 7:48 seems to pave the way, literally, for the Samaritan conversion in Acts 8. It says in Acts 7:48 that the Lord does not dwell in a temple made by human hands. The Jerusalem Temple is therefore no longer an issue. Nevertheless, the apostles themselves always function in Acts 1-8 in the context of Jerusalem. When the rest of the Jerusalem church is scattered, isn't it interesting that the Apostles themselves remain at Jerusalem in Acts 8:1? While they may on occasion venture out of Jerusalem, they promptly return. For Luke they are always the pillars of Israel. They continue to represent a sort of true Israel. So when the Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit from the Jerusalem Apostles' hands, the chasm between Samaritan and orthodox Jews was bridged. What humans, with all their ethnic hatred, could not do, the Spirit accomplishes.

When the Spirit does not come in the water baptism as expected, the whole episode forces the Samaritans to submit to the laying on of the Jerusalem Apostles' hands. The Jerusalem Apostles had to personally preside over the Samaritan reception of the Spirit. The Spirit WAS THEREFORE FORCING TWO SEPARATE BODIES OF ISRAELITES TO BE REUNITED. Heterodox Samaria is once again restored to orthodoxy, an orthodoxy represented in the Jerusalem Apostles. The Samaritans will not receive the Holy Spirit apart from the Jerusalem Apostles. There will be no separate Samaritan, Christian church autonomous of the Jerusalem church. The old walls of division are torn down by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Luke's motif of ethnic hostility between Jews and Samaritans up to this point is surely the key to the proper interpretation of Acts 8 and the separation of the Spirit from water baptism. We know that we have been on the right track in our interpretation when we get to Acts 10-11. Consider Acts 10-11 from the perspective of ethnic tensions. The Jews with Peter are all surprised that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit and particularly, "in the same way" as the Jews had at Pentecost. Acts 10:45 speaks of the astonishment of those with Peter that the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Since the Gentiles were given "THE SAME GIFT" (11:17) as the Jews at Pentecost, Peter could not hinder them. The gift of the Spirit came to them "as also to us." The reception of tongues forced the Jewish apostles to recognize the Gentiles as fellow recipients of the Spirit. God had already gone out of His way with a vision to Peter that the Gentiles are to be considered clean. Then he sent the Holy Spirit upon them in an undeniable way. Thus the Holy Spirit was overcoming human prejudice against the Gentiles in Acts 10-11 by these extraordinary manifestations. Salvation was therefore clearly for all. Acts 15 portrays a Jerusalem council mindful of what God was doing among the Gentiles. Like the gap between Jew and Samaritan, the Spirit was now forcing the bridging of the gap between Jew and Gentile. Acts is a story of the Spirit intervening in the midst of the human condition of weakness and sin. Where the Jerusalem church had been initially slow to take the Gospel to new groups, the Spirit was taking the initiative. People found themselves having to "catch up" with the Spirit's activity. Nothing, not even ethnic conflict, could stand in the way of the Spirit's work.

Acts is a story of the Spirit at work in human affairs, the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:1). We should not be surprised, then, at the unusual delay of the Spirit in Acts 8, since it provided a unique opportunity to bring two groups of Christians once divided together. And once again, as Luke carefully qualifies the events: Acts 8 confirms that the Spirit and water baptism do indeed go together even as Acts 2:38 indicated.

This strong understanding of water baptism as conveying forgiveness and the Holy Spirit will not conform to a theology with a diluted view of water baptism, as in Reformed theology. Nor will it permit a charismatic theology that urges Christians to see themselves as having "something missing" in their experience of the Spirit. Rather, the pastor ought to encourage members to recognize that the Holy Spirit was granted to them in their baptism. People ought to be encouraged to make use of the Spirit's power in their daily lives. The search for spiritual renewal and power finds its answer at the baptismal font.

In our next discussion, we will expand on baptism's role in bringing together believers of various persuasions and backgrounds into a unity. We will look at baptism's role in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

"BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT"

1 PETER 3:18-22

I would like to talk to you for the next hour and a half about probably the toughest baptismal text in the New Testament. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:21 "baptism now saves you." Actually, v. 21 is embedded within the logic of vv. 18-22. I want to work through these verses as well in order to place them within the surrounding context of what precedes v. 18 and what follows after v. 22. This passage has always really intrigued me, long before I began any formal training in the Scriptures. We learn about Christ visiting the spirits in prison in v. 19. My guess is that many of you have probably been tantalized by this text as well. Let me take a stab at this text in the next hour and a half. No guarantees I'll be able to answer all your questions, but with reckless abandon, why don't we just dive in anyway?

I. The Relation to Context

I think the best place to start would be to ask how our paragraph of vv. 18-22 relate to what Peter has just said in v. 17. In v. 17 Peter writes: "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." Verse 18 then begins with the word "for" (*hoti*) and we learn in v. 18 that "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." Verse 18 looks like a great illustration of v. 17, in fact, the best illustration of all. Christ is a great model of suffering for doing good. But unfortunately, v. 18 isn't its own sentence. The thought continues in the following verses. And it's hard when we look at v. 19 to see Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison, let alone the discussion of Noah and baptism in what follows, as furthering the thought of v. 17 about suffering for doing good. So it doesn't look like vv. 18-22 are explaining just v. 17. A more likely option is that vv. 18-22 are developing the thought of the preceding unit as a whole, that is, 1 Peter 3:13-17. The topic in vv. 13-17 had been the admonition to do good to those who persecute you. Look especially at vv. 13 and 14: "Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed." Peter returns to suffering for doing good in v. 17 which forms an *inclusio* which sandwiches or binds vv. 13-17 into a unit revolving around suffering for the faith. But vv. 18-22, as the following unit of thought, speaks about Jesus Christ's victory over the forces of evil.

So what's the relationship between vv. 13-17 about suffering for the faith and vv. 18-22 about Jesus Christ's victory over the forces of evil? The very same Christians who are surrounded by hostile forces in vv. 13-17 have the firm assurance through the fate of the Lord Jesus in vv. 18-22 that they too will emerge victorious from their present sufferings even as Jesus himself did. Then in 4:1-2 Peter will make the connection explicit between Christ who suffered in the flesh and Christians who must suffer in the flesh in order to live according to God's will. In short, the point of this passage in vv. 18-22 is that Christians can be confident that they will triumph over the powers currently arrayed against them. Christ, the righteous one, can lead them, the unrighteous, to God since by his suffering and resurrection he has overcome all the hostile forces that could hinder their access to God.

Verses 18-22 explain that the Christian's access to God is made available THROUGH BAPTISM, a saving event comparable only to Noah's rescue from a world similarly about to be destroyed. On the basis of Baptism, Christians can face their future with confidence, no matter what suffering the future may hold since Christ has already triumphed over the powerful forces of the universe. Christ's salvation promise is sure and will sustain us until the judgment and Christ's return to rescue us from tormented lives. In other words, we should not shy away from this text, because it is a text proclaiming victory, and a victory to be found in BAPTISM. Let's now look at these verses in a little more detail.

II. Verse 18

Christ certainly suffered even as Christians may suffer according to v. 17. But the similarities end there. Christ suffered "once and for all." HE suffered "for sins" and "the righteous one for the unrighteous." Christ's suffering is clearly UNIQUE. Christ's suffering for sin is made possible simply because he is the righteous one who does not have to die FOR HIS OWN sins! "Once for all" - unlike the OT sacrifices, there is no need to repeat what Christ has done. Now the point of v. 18 is not to justify the innocent suffering by Christians mentioned in v. 13. No, something far more significant is going on. No Christian can suffer for sins once and for all as the righteous for the unrighteous. Rather Peter is now giving the objective basis for salvation and for the readers' confidence in the face of their own unjust sufferings. Christ by his suffering and resurrection has emerged victorious over the opposing powers in his unique death. Peter is not promoting ethics here but confidence. [some mss have "died" rather than "suffered," but suffered fits the immediate context with its use in 3:14, 17; 4:1, 13-15; 5:1, 9-10. An emphasis on Christ's suffering rather than his death.] The point of Christ's suffering is "in order to bring you to God." The noun form of the verb means "access to God" and "access to God" is precisely the point here. Christ's sufferings allow the Christian readers access to God.

V. 18 goes on: "He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit." We need to recognize right away that it is a foreign idea to speak of the flesh and spirit as two separate components of human existence, like body and soul. That's not a biblical distinction but a Greek one. Nothing else in 1 Peter suggests that he is thinking in the Greek tradition. We have to realize that we live in a culture that has inherited the Greek tradition that the soul is capable of existing apart from the body. But not 1 Peter.

Whenever the New Testament speaks of Christ being "made alive," it is referring to his bodily resurrection (e.g. Rom. 4:17; 8:11 and 1 Cor. 15:22). This is not a contrast between Christ's physical body and his vital principle or divine nature, but with Christ as a PERSON who was put to death and raised. But if we grant all that, what does Peter mean by contrasting flesh and spirit? [This contrast is common in the New Testament and typically refers to two different ways to live one's life, whether one is living one's life in sin or according to God's plan. (see Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 24:39; John 3:6; 6:63; Rom. 1:4; 8:4, 5, 6, 9, 13; Gal. 3:3; 4:29; 5:16-19; 6:8; Col. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 12:9; also 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 7:1). Our author uses "flesh" in 1:24 in the biblical way: the whole of mortal humanity. See also 2:11; 3:21; 4:1, 2, 6; for "spirit" see 1:2, 11, 12; 2:5; 3:4; 4:6, 14.]

Let me suggest a better translation: "Christ was put to death BY MEANS OF flesh, but raised to life BY MEANS OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT." [Christ was put to death in the [DATIVE OF] sphere of human existence and raised in the sphere of the divine Spirit.] The Spirit's raising of Christ is a central affirmation all throughout the NT. [See Acts 3:15; 4:10; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:4; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:10.] But what of being put to death by means of flesh?

In 1 Peter 1:24, "flesh" refers to "humanity" and the same translation would work well here too. Humanity is simply the agent of

Christ's death. Christ was put to death by humans and raised by the agency of the divine Spirit. The advantage of this view is that it maintains the same bodily resurrection of Christ that is spoken of elsewhere in the NT, and it maintains the same agency of the Spirit in that resurrection spoken of elsewhere in the NT. [Note the second instrumental dative in 1 Cor. 6:11.]

[While the opening "for Christ also" reproduces the same words from 2:21 in a similar context (3:17: superiority of innocent over guilty suffering; 2:20: superiority of undeserved over deserved punishment) and could lead one to assume a similar discussion of Christ's exemplary suffering would follow here as in 2:22-24, the word "once and for all" is ABSENT in 2:21 and must be taken into account. Its presence and the strong notion of Christ's redemption of sinners through his death and resurrection renders the suffering of Christ inimitable.] Let's move on to v. 19.

III. Verse 19

V. 19 begins with the words "in which" at the beginning. To what does "in which" refer? The most natural antecedent would be "spirit" at the end of v. 18. We have translated v. 18 as "BY the Spirit." Note the word "also" (or kai) alongside "in which." In other words, what is happening in v. 19 is IN ADDITION TO being raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit. The point in v. 19 is NOT that Christ carried on his proclamation in some sort of Greek, disembodied, spiritual form but that Christ offered proclamation by means of the SAME SPIRIT that raised him from the dead. And nothing indicates that this proclamation took place between Christ's death and resurrection. On the contrary, if this is something that Christ does by the Spirit ALSO, or IN ADDITION TO being raised from the dead, then this is the RISEN CHRIST making proclamation to the spirits. The "also" signals the second act that takes place by means of the Spirit: the first being the resurrection and the second Christ's proclamation.

Now who are "the spirits in prison"? It may be tempting on first glance to take this as a reference to humans who have died. [Heb. 12:23; 1 Enoch 22:3-4; 103:3-4 (NOTE THE ADJECTIVE "RIGHTEOUS").] But we ought to keep in mind that the overwhelming use of the word "spirits" in the New Testament refers NOT to human dead BUT TO SUPERNATURAL BEINGS [e.g. Heb. 1:14; 12:9; Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6], and especially MALEVOLENT SUPERNATURAL BEINGS [e.g. Mark 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11; 5:2, 8]. The absolute use of "spirits" in the NT as we are seeing here is rare but when it occurs, it always refers to evil spirits [see Matt. 8:16; 12:45; Luke 10:20; 2 Macc. 3:24; Jub. 15:31; 1 Enoch 60:1-3]. That means that these "spirits" are most likely supernatural beings. In the gospels Jesus traces evil on the earth at one point to Satan in Luke 10:17-20, but nowhere else do we hear that Satan's angelic followers are imprisoned.

But we have to keep in mind that in first century Jewish writings there was an entire tradition revolving around the interpretation of Gen. 6:1-6 where the sons of God, or angels, took wives from the daughters of men. In Jewish tradition these angelic beings or "spirits," whose disobedience caused the flood, were subsequently IMPRISONED.

[Jub. 7:21; 1 Enoch 6-16; 18:12-19:2; 21:1-10; 54:3-6; 64-69; 106:14-15; 2 Enoch 7:1-3; Wis 14:6; Jub. 5:6; T. Naph. 3:5; T. Reub. 5:6; 2 Bar. 56:13; CD 2:18. They are identified as "spirits" in 1 Enoch 13:6; 15:4, 6, 7; cf. Jub. 10:1-9. Their sin was to take human wives (So Gen. 6:1-4; 1 Enoch 10:2, 7, 22; 67:4-13; 106:14-15; Wis 14:6; T. Naph. 3:5; cf. 2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6). The offspring of their sinful union became the source of the world's evil in Jewish tradition. [1 Enoch 10:2; 15:1-9; 2 Enoch 18:1-5.]

But what is the nature and location of their prison? Nowhere in the New Testament is the word "prison" used for an abode of the dead. The word referred either to actual physical prisons (e.g. Acts 5:19; 8:3; 12:4; 22:4; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23) OR TO THE PLACE WHERE SATAN (OR DEMONS) IS IMPRISONED (see, for instance, Rev. 18:12; 20:7). That such a prison exists for evil "spirits" is assumed both in Revelation and in Jewish tradition, especially in the Jewish traditions revolving around the biblical figure of Enoch. But the location of that prison is unclear: whether on earth (Rev. 20:3 apparently; 2 Pet. 2:4; 1 Enoch 10:4; 14:5; 15:8, 10; 18:12-14; 67:7; 103:3-7; Jub. 5:6; 1QH 3:17-18) or in the heavens (Eph 6:12; 2 Enoch 7:1-3; 18:3; T. Levi 3:1-3) or at the end of both heaven and earth (1 Enoch 1:14; 21:1-10; cf. 18:11-19:1). Jewish tradition varies on the location, and so we cannot be sure at this point. Christ's activity is described with two verbs: "went" or "proceed" and "made a proclamation [preached]." Since other NT passages such as Rom. 10:7 and Eph. 4:8-10 refer to Christ's descent to the netherworld (also Matt. 12:40; Acts 2:27; Rev. 1:18; 5:13), the word "went" or "proceed" here in 1 Peter 3 is often taken as "descend." The assumption is that Jesus descended in v. 19 and then ascended to heaven in v. 22. BUT: the Greek word for "went" or "proceed" never means "descend." The word for "descend" is a different Greek word, and a Greek word which IS used in those passages speaking of Christ's descent (see Rom. 10:7; Eph. 4:9-10; cf. Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15). On the contrary, the word for "went" or "proceed" here in 1 Peter is the same word used elsewhere NOT for a descent but for CHRIST'S ASCENSION as in Acts 1:10-11 (cf. John 14:2, 3, 28; 16:28). There is no reason why it could not mean "ascend" here as well.

Contemporary Jewish literature from the first century indicated that the evil spirits were imprisoned in the HEAVENS (e.g. 2 Enoch 7:1-3; T. Levi 3:2; cf. Eph. 6:12). Further, since this is the activity of the RISEN Christ, it would make an ascent more likely than a descent. Finally, the same verb ("go," "proceed") is used for Christ's ASCENSION in 3:22. Thus, it is more natural to understand it in the same way here. Both vv. 19 and 22 would be referring to the SAME ONE JOURNEY and NOT two.

So, WHEN did Christ "go" and "preach" to the "imprisoned spirits"? The reference to Christ's DEATH AND RESURRECTION in v. 18 renders it unlikely that the events in v. 19 happened PRIOR to those events. Since nothing in the text indicates an activity between death and resurrection, the activity of going and preaching would have been AFTER the resurrection during Christ's ASCENT. Christ not only went but he preached. BUT WHAT did he preach to the imprisoned spirits? This word group in the Greek (kerusso) is used most frequently for salvific proclamation, but not always. Some think that if these are human beings who are the "imprisoned spirits," then the content was the gospel of salvation, perhaps an announcement of the need for repentance to the human dead. [in general, the righteous, those of OT times, the generation of Noah, those repenting prior to the flood or as the unrighteous for whom Christ suffered in 3:18.] BUT: the Greek word kerusso need NOT be the proclamation of the gospel of salvation. It can be used in a strictly neutral sense (e.g. Luke 12:3; Rom. 2:21; Rev. 5:2). Note JONAH 1:2 which ALSO has the same combination of terms in the Greek Septuagint.

GO AND PREACH was part of God's command for Jonah to announce Ninevah's destruction, hardly a saving message. When the

verb for proclaiming used for Christian preaching, it is used with an OBJECT such as the "gospel" to indicate the CONTENT of the preaching (or "kingdom of God" or "Christ," etc.). Rom. 2:21 uses this word with JEWISH ETHICS as the object of the proclamation. Gal. 5:11 speaks of preaching CIRCUMCISION (hypothetically); Rev. 5:2 for a general angelic summons to open a scroll. [See also perhaps Matt. 10:27 and Luke 12:3] Now if this passage is referring, like contemporary Jewish literature [Enochic], to the REBELLIOUS ANGELS, then a saving message is even less likely. In fact, Jude 14-15 cites the Enochic legends on Genesis 6:1-6. [also 2 Pet. 2:4. 1 Enoch 80:65-67 is referred to in Barn. 16:5 as SCRIPTURE: legei gar graphe]. Jude's readers need not know 1 Enoch as such. They need only know the gist of the legends in order to comprehend its application to the risen Christ. In the context of 1 Peter, the preaching would not have been of salvation but their condemnation.

In the context of Christ's resurrection in v. 18, the condemnation of the imprisoned spirits was the outcome of Christ's victorious rising from the dead. The evil powers have been defeated by the risen Christ on his way to the right hand of God (3:22). In the process of his ascent to glory, Christ announces to the imprisoned angelic powers his victory and their defeat. [confirming the provisional defeat at the hands of the earthly Jesus in Mark 3:27; Luke 10:18; 11:20; Rom. 16:20; cf. Rev. 12:7-12] And note how this interpretation respects the fact that Christ's resurrection has already taken place in v. 18. It also maintains the normal usage of "spirits" as angelic beings. It retains for "go" or "proceed" (poreutheis) the SAME meaning it will have in 3:22, where it is used for the final step in Christ's ascension to the right hand.

Finally, THIS EMPHASIS ON THE TRIUMPH OF JESUS OVER THE POWERS OF EVIL WOULD ENCOURAGE THE CHRISTIAN READERS TO REMAIN FAITHFUL. In other words, although there are hostile forces in their world arrayed against them, they need not fear since even the supernatural forces of evil have been defeated. Christ's victory over the supernatural forces of evil serves to guarantee their own ultimate victory and encourages their steadfastness. They can continue to "revere Christ as Lord," as 3:14 puts it, knowing that NO REAL HARM can come to those who do remain faithful (3:13). Any suffering they endure is to be preferred to caving in to pressure and denying Christ (3:17). Let me put all this another way: if this passage is talking about some sort of MISSIONARY preaching to evil entities or damned souls, how would that provide comfort to Christians who were suffering according to vv. 13-17? If God relented on such evil entities or souls, why even bother to endure suffering. Why not just go ahead and deny Christ, avoid suffering, and then count on some future saving message after death? In that case these verses would hardly offer any encouragement to suffering Christians. On the contrary, all this fits very neatly the Jewish tradition of fallen angels who became a source of evil on the earth. Then, according to Jewish tradition, came Enoch, the man who walked with God, who was taken up into heaven and announced doom to the rebellious angels. Only in 1 Peter's version, it's not Enoch, but Christ announces their doom, a Christ who rises from dead, victorious over all the forces of evil and sits at God's right hand. Christ is the one who announces their doom and thereby instills confidence in those who would follow him.

IV. Verse 20

Let's move on now to v. 20. We have to always keep in mind that the context of vv. 20-21 is vv. 18-19 and 22. Vv. 18-19 and 22 recount the salvific and triumphant career of Christ in his suffering, death and resurrection. Vv. 20-21 are showing how Christians can SHARE in Christ's victorious and saving career. Vv. 29-31 do this by an analogy. God saved Noah and his family from an evil world through the waters of the flood, even as God saves Christians from an evil world through baptism, a victory to be consummated with the return of Christ. Both the content and context in vv. 20-21 show how Christians share in Christ's victorious and saving work.

V. 20 tells us something more about the evil, imprisoned spirits of v. 19. They were certainly disobedient, but there is more. The words "did not obey" is a participle in the Greek and the participle is not in attributive position. That means that the proper translation could very well be causal: "BECAUSE they were disobedient." In other words, BECAUSE the spirits were disobedient, they were imprisoned. Or perhaps because they were disobedient Christ announced his victory over them. The reference to the time of Noah does not indicate that the "spirits" are human. 1 Peter is following the Enoch traditions that had associated the rebellious angels with the Noah accounts, even to the point of attributing the flood to evil angels' taking human wives in disobedience. [1 Enoch 10:1-14; 64-67; 106:13-18; Jub. 5:1-5; T. Naph. 3.5; CD 2.18-20; 3 Macc. 2:4; 1 Enoch 106.13; 2 Enoch 7.3; CD 2.18; the word is used for disobedience in 1 Peter 1:2, 14, 22; 2:8; 3:1.]

The NRSV's translation "in former times" is misleading since the Greek word (pote) means any indefinite time.[e.g. Luke 23:32; Rom. 1:10; 1 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 5:29; Phil. 4:10; 1 Thess. 2:5; Heb. 1:5, 13; 2 Pet. 1:10, 21. It can be used to indicate a contrast with a former condition (with "now" in Rom. 11:30; Eph. 2:13; 5:8; Col. 1:21; 3:7; Phlm 11) and implicitly in John 9:13; Gal. 1:13, 23; Eph. 2:2, 3, 11; Tit. 3:3. The combination with HOTE here indicates clearly THE GENERAL TIME OF THE FLOOD AND NOT IN CONTRAST TO ANOTHER TIME.] To translate it as "formerly" can lead to the misunderstanding that the disobedience of the spirits was not permanent. Let me offer a more precise translation: Christ went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison "BECAUSE THEY [i.e. the imprisoned spirits] WERE DISOBEDIENT AT THE TIME WHEN GOD'S PATIENCE WAITED...." The reference to God's patient waiting is probably a reflection of Gen. 6:21: God was long-suffering prior to the flood and delayed it out of mercy toward those opposing him (e.g. also Rom. 2:4; 3:25; Acts 14:16; 17:30). Thus, God patiently endured for a while the evil of a society that opposed him. And so Peter's audience can conclude that similarly GOD IS PRESENTLY ENDURING A TIME OF EVIL IN A SOCIETY OPPOSING THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. [But nothing in this context indicates that the response to God's patience on the part of humanity will be a negative one or that the delay is to give more people a chance to be saved in Christ. The attention in v. 21 is on those INSIDE and NOT those outside the Christian community.] [The passive form of the verb for the building of the ark in the genitive absolute may allude to 1 Enoch 67:2 where the ark was built by angels. Noah's building activity is ignored here.] [The prepositional phrase "eis hen" does NOT mean "into which," its normal meaning, given the verb diesothesan which presumes the meaning "IN" rather than by entry "into" the ark. The sense is probably that they entered the ark and were saved IN it rather than eis being confused with en.] The mention of the "few" saved in the ark probably offers encouragement to a small minority in the midst of a hostile Greco-Roman world. [Psychai means "LIVES" and not "souls" as if in Greek philosophical thought.]

While the ark served as a symbol of the church in early ecclesiastical tradition and its wood as a reminder of the wood of the cross, the SYMBOL OF SALVATION HERE IS THE WATER rather than the ark. The verb "saved" (diasozo) is used EIGHT TIMES in the NT with the sense of "rescue" or "deliver" from some imminent danger (Matt. 14:36; Luke 7:3; Acts 23:24; 27:43, 44; 28:1, 4). The

passive form points to God as the deliverer of those in the ark. The words "through water" could be INSTRUMENTAL or LOCAL. As instrumental it would mean that the water was the instrument by means of which those in the ark were saved. In the next verse, the water of baptism is instrumental in human salvation. BUT, it was the ARK and NOT the water that saved them, and water was the instrument of destruction. Perhaps we ought to think in terms of a less literal locative construal here. NOAH'S JOURNEY "THROUGH THE FLOOD WATERS" LED TO HIS DELIVERANCE FROM THE EVIL WHICH HAD INFESTED THE WORLD AND WHICH THE WATERS WERE INTENDED TO DESTROY. Thus the waters effected Noah's deliverance from his evil world even as baptism effects the deliverance of Christians from the contemporary, evil world. BY PASSING THROUGH THESE WATERS, WE, LIKE NOAH, ENTERED INTO A NEW EXISTENCE. AS NOAH WAS RESCUED THROUGH THE WATER OF THE FLOOD FROM AN EVIL WORLD AND SUBSEQUENTLY ENTERED INTO A NEW AND CLEANSED WORLD, SO THE CHRISTIAN IS RESCUED THROUGH THE WATER OF BAPTISM) FROM AN EVIL WORLD AND ARE DELIVERED INTO THE NEW WORLD OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

V. Verse 21

We've really already begun to take into account v. 21. [The relative pronoun "ho" joins this to the previous verse. "Antitype" and "baptism" serve as the COMPOUND SUBJECT of the verb "saves." It is the INTERRELATIONSHIP of the pronoun and the two nouns that is the syntactic problem in the first phrase of the verse. If, as seems likely, the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb, then the two remaining nouns stand in apposition to it. Some take "antitype" as an adjective ("antitypal baptism" saves you"), or in APPOSITION TO "YOU," to take "baptism" as a proleptic antecedent to the "ho," to include the first phrase with the end of the preceding verse, that is: "... saved through water which even in reference to you (is) a pattern. Baptism now saves, not ..."; or to substitute the dative "ho" for the nominative relative pronoun, with a few minor texts. The complexity of the sentence is, however, in all likelihood the result of the complex attempt to relate Noah and the flood as a means of deliverance to Christian baptism as a means of salvation, and ought thus to be allowed to stand.]

The discussion of baptism in v. 21 as another use of water for deliverance really began with the emphasis on "water" at the end of v. 20. [This sentence in the Greek begins with a relative pronoun that could refer to the entire phrase which had closed v. 20, or, more likely, it refers to the "water" which had immediately preceded. The emphasis in v. 21 on baptism While the introductory "ho" as a neuter singular COULD be related to the entire preceding phrase, its more likely antecedent is "WATER" which IMMEDIATELY precedes. Since the emphasis is here on BAPTISM as another use of water for deliverance, the more obvious syntactic relationship is preferable.] [The word "antitype" is rare in the NT (elsewhere only in Heb. 9:24 where it refers to the inferior copy of a superior original, a meaning the word is unlikely to bear in this context).] The water of the flood is the type even as baptism is the antitype. In other words, there is a continuity in God's actions in both the old and the new Israel. [even as the author has appropriated Israel language for the Christian community] Like the word "antitype," the temporal adverb "now" calls attention to the contrast between Noah's time (pote-then) and the present.

The central thrust of the verse is the affirmation that "baptism saves you." This is defined in the rest of the verse by what baptism DOES and DOES NOT mean. By the way, the reference to water at the beginning of the verse guarantees that we are indeed talking about the rite of baptism. Now the power of baptism to save does not come from the water in some mysterious way but the water used in conjunction with the RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. We see this affirmed in the final phrase of the verse ("through the resurrection of Christ"). The power of baptism is NOT then in the individual's right attitude to God but GOD'S ACTION!! Like Romans 6:1-11, APART FROM BAPTISM ONE DOES NOT SHARE IN CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION. [BUT: there is no reference to rebegetting as in 1:3.] The immediate context refers to sharing in victory over the forces of evil (vv. 19, 22) by Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism incorporates us into that power and that victory. Baptism is NOT "the putting off of the filth of the flesh" (sarkos apothesis rhpou). ["Putting off" is rare in the NT and is only used elsewhere in 2 Pet. 1:14 where it means putting off one's physical body at the time of the parousia.] Similar language is used for putting away or getting rid of one's old humanity in Eph. 4:22 and its practices in Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1. [This word does NOT mean "washing."] But the filth of the flesh is NOT physical but MORAL: MORAL IMPURITY. If so, then according to 1 Peter that is what BAPTISM IS NOT!! BAPTISM IS NOT THE PUTTING AWAY OF MORAL IMPURITY? O.K., I think you can see the problem. We're surely not saying that baptism ISN'T the putting off of the flesh in terms of moral impurity.

Let me offer you a much more likely interpretation: BAPTISM DOES NOT PUT OFF THE FILTH OF THE FLESH BY MEANS OF CIRCUMCISION!! The foreskin is unclean in Lev. 19:23; Jer. 4:1-4. Uncircumcision is uncleanness in 1 Sam. 17:26; Jer. 9:26. The foreskin is the "flesh" in Gen. 17:11. We see a similar idea in Colossians. In Col. 3:8-9 we find the same verb to "strip off." Colossians 2:11-12 speaks of a "stripping off" with reference to a circumcision made WITHOUT hands (baptism) as the means whereby the Christian puts off the "body of the flesh." 1 Peter could easily be saying the same thing. BAPTISM IS NOT A RITE SIMILAR TO JEWISH CIRCUMCISION. It is not a purely physical act. This would neatly dovetail with the emphasis all throughout 1 Peter's emphasis on how the Gentile recipients of the letter have become God's people through Christ. The titles of Israel as God's people are now theirs. The Gentiles are simply saved through baptism and not the rite of circumcision.

The next phrase in the verse, though, is more difficult (suneideseos agathes eperotema eis theon). First, the verbal noun "conscience" (suneidesis) identifies shared or joint knowledge and is used in antiquity for "awareness" or "consciousness." The word "conscience" here is NOT the subjective feeling of guilt or innocence that we normally associate with the word. It refers rather to A GOOD AND LOYAL ATTITUDE OF MIND THAT LEADS TO SOUND BEHAVIOR. In 2:19 it refers to CONSCIOUSNESS and in 3:16 to BEHAVIOR GROWING OUT OF SUCH CONSCIOUSNESS, but in both cases it refers to a focus on activity pleasing to God rather than some inward psycho-moral state. "Good conscience" means a CONSCIOUSNESS OF WHAT GOD WANTS THAT WILL ALSO LEAD ONE TO DO IT. Second, what does "appeal" (eperotema) mean? The word occurs only here in the New Testament. [Elsewhere it means "QUESTION" or "INQUIRY." Some inscriptions used the same word for a "decree" or "decision" by an august body.

It can also refer in the Greek papyri to stipulations of a contractual nature. The verb refers in biblical Greek to a REQUEST (e.g. Matt. 16:1). In non-biblical Greek, the verb is used for "having been asked" or the verbal noun ("what has been asked"). Since the verb "ask a question, make a request" is more frequent in the NT, one can derive the meaning of the less clear noun from the

clearer verb and thus "request" or "plea" and since it is directed toward God, as "PRAYER," perhaps also with the further idea that this request will also shape one's behavior on light of that which one requested.] This word is also used in CONTRACTUAL LANGUAGE in secular Greek [the papyri]. It was the PLEDGE ONE TOOK TO UPHOLD THE AGREEMENT. The early church's baptismal liturgy included a confession of faith in response to a corresponding question. At Qumran, one had to make a pledge along with the ritual. Thus, we're talking about a PLEDGE here, the PLEDGE of a good conscience.

There are two ways of understanding the relationship between pledge or prayer and good conscience. First, this could be [subjective genitive] the pledge that arises or proceeds from a good conscience. But the problem with this view is that baptism would no longer be the saving agent through the power of Christ's resurrection. One would ALREADY have had a good conscience and then baptism would just be the expression of a prayer or pledge arising from that state. In other words, a good conscience would have been present prior to the baptismal act. But such a good conscience is precisely what baptism was intended to mediate by "saving" the individual. [The relationship between "conscience/consciousness" and "pledge" is expressed by the genitive phrase *suneideseos agathes*. If it is a subjective genitive, then it is the prayer or pledge that arises or proceeds from a good conscience. If it is a prayer, then the baptisand addresses his or her prayer to God because of a good conscience, that is, the consciousness of God and the resulting activity, which the petitioner ALREADY POSSESSES. If it is a pledge, then it is a pledge to God of unspecified content arising from the good conscience the believer already possesses. If it is an OBJECTIVE genitive, then the good conscience is the content of the prayer or pledge made by the baptisand. If a prayer, then the baptisand addresses a prayer to God for a good conscience, that is, for a consciousness of God and the ensuing appropriate activity, that he or she will maintain a "good conscience," i.e. a consciousness of God and a good and decent conduct

Arguments can be made for ALL these positions. The subjective interpretation is the WEAKER. Least persuasive is the position that the phrase is a prayer to God arising from a good conscience, since then the content of the prayer is left unspecified, and the salvation through the resurrection of Christ provided in baptism must presume a commitment to God and its corresponding activity, in this verse identified as the way baptism saved, as being already present PRIOR to that salvific act.

A similar problem arises from understanding the phrase to be a pledge to God arising from a good conscience, since although the content of the pledge (good conscience) is clear, the results of the baptismal salvation must again be assumed to be present PRIOR to the baptism itself. The objective genitive is more likely since *sarkos rhyupou* is OBJECTIVE to apotheosis. Also there is the CONTENT. To understand the phrase as defining baptism made salvific by its relationship to the risen Christ in terms of the baptisand's prayer to God that he or she may hold fast to a sound consciousness of God and so act appropriately is attractive theologically and fits the larger context of the letter. BUT: *eperotema* does NOT bear that meaning in the inscriptions or the papyri where it means "EDICT," often as a response to a formal plea, or "PLEDGE" as part of a contractual obligation. More likely, then, the word is "PLEDGE" and refers to the response of the baptisand to God (*eis theon*) IN LIGHT OF THE BAPTISMAL ACT, which is made salvific by its relationship to Christ's resurrection.]

A second option is more likely. Baptism is the pledge of a good conscience, that is, for a consciousness of God and the appropriate activity that involves. The individual is also praying in the baptismal act for a "good conscience," a consciousness of God and the good and decent conduct that goes with that consciousness. [This would match the objective genitive "putting off the flesh."] In other words, this is all the response of the baptized individual who offers a pledge on the basis of the saving baptismal act, an act which itself had been effective through the power of Christ's resurrection.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM therefore differs from circumcision, the initiating act of the Jews, which symbolized only a preoccupation with PHYSICAL purity. Christian baptism CONCERNS THE TOTAL LIFE OF THE individual. And how is this so? PART OF THE RITUAL OF BAPTISM CONSISTS IN PLEDGING TO MAINTAIN A CONSCIOUSNESS OF GOD, and that pledge is made possible and empowered by the resurrection of Christ. CHRIST'S DEFEAT OF THE ANGELIC FORCES OF EVIL makes possible the pledge offered in baptism and in response to baptism. Let me summarize vv. 20-21: baptism as the antitype of Noah's deliverance through water from his evil contemporaries similarly delivers Christians from their evil contemporary world. And it delivers by allowing Christians, through their participation in the power of the risen Christ and his defeat of the powers of evil, to live a life pleasing to God and appropriate to their redemption through Christ. TO be saved in baptism also entails responsibility in the form of the baptismal pledge. One must maintain a proper Christian lifestyle in the midst of a hostile world. This is central to the letter as a whole.

VI. Verse 22

Moving on to v. 22, this is the climax of the paragraph. Christ has ascended and is exalted at God's right hand and has ascended. He has subjugated the superhuman powers. [The dislocation of the normal order (ascension, exaltation) is due to the author's desire to link this verse with the reference to Jesus Christ in v. 21's conclusion. The introductory pronoun is less credal (*hos*) than part of the structure of the verse.] [The language of verse reflects Ps. 110:1 (quoted in relation to Christ's exaltation in Acts 2:34; Heb. 1:13) and may go back to Jesus (Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69). Allusions to this tradition may retain *ek dexion* from the psalm or use the comparable phrase *en dexia*. This author uses the latter as he depends on the TRADITION vs. the psalm itself.] V. 22 refers to Christ's ascension as distinct from the resurrection. The same verb is used here for the ascension as in v. 19. In other words, this is the same event. The powers are subjugated, then, by means of Christ's proclamation of victory to them. [The lack of any explicit connection between the ascension and the ensuing reference to the subjugation of the superhuman powers is due to the fact that the same event is envisioned here as in v. 19 (the SAME verb for Christ's journey, and the mode of subjugation there was described as his proclamation to those powers).] Jewish thought held that such superhuman powers governed nations and were behind idolatry. [See 1 Enoch 99.7; Jub. 1.11; 22.17). Perhaps also 1 Cor. 10:19-21; Rev. 9:20. It is also used for powers affecting human life (see Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:6-8; Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:8; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15). See Rom. 8:3, 8 for "angels" and "powers," 1 Cor. 15:24 and Eph. 1:21 for "authorities" and "powers." This is probably just exemplary.]

1 Peter affirms that EVIL POWERS ARE STILL RAMPANT BUT THEY HAVE BEEN ROBBED OF THEIR ULTIMATE POWER THROUGH CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND HIS ASSUMPTION OF DIVINE AUTHORITY. Christ's authority will soon become

visible with God's final judgment. THAT MEANS THAT THESE POWERS CANNOT HARM CHRISTIANS (see 3:13). THE LORD OF THE COSMOS RULES OVER THEM ALL IN VICTORY AND CHRISTIANS WILL SHARE IN THAT VICTORY even though they are currently a beleaguered community facing an onslaught of evil powers intent on their destruction! EVIL. The Context of 1 Peter 4:1-6 The "therefore" (oun) in 4:1 resumes the discussion of 3:18.

3:18 and 4:6 form an INCLUSIO. The reference to Christ's suffering in 4:1 recalls the reference to Christ's suffering in 3:18a. Similarly, the putting away of sin in 4:1b reflects a similar point in 3:18a. The contrast between flesh and spirit in 4:6 recalls 3:18b.

The exhortations in 4:2-5 must be therefore be understood in relation to this wider unit. In fact, the quotation of Ps. 34 in 1 Peter 3:10-12 which began in 3:13 contains the gist of the point made here. Thus 4:1-6 is part of a broader unit of thought. The exhortations in 4:2-5 apply to the lives of readers the point made about Christ's triumph over the supernatural evil powers in 3:19, 22.

Believers are free now to live in accordance with the will of God (4:2) rather than in conformity with the expectations of their contemporary culture (4:2-3). Despite the abuse that comes from nonconformity to contemporary cultural values (4:4), God's final judgment will vindicate the way they have chosen to live in 4:5-6. And all this began with the believer's salvation through the waters of baptism. Peter believes that baptism entails a commitment to right action in Christ. Sanctification is included as a pledge in our very justification. Christ will therefore triumph over the evil in our individual lives as well. We live as a church militant, but a church in victory!

[Strongly implied is a contrast between past and present, between former behavior and conformity with "the desires of humanity" and present behavior which now DOES bring such opprobrium from humans but has God's full approval (5:10).

4:1-6 is Christian life in contemporary culture even as 4:7-11 is Christian living with one another.

THE SUFFERING IS NOT OFFICIAL PERSECUTION in 4:3-4 BUT DUE TO LEAVING THE "LIFESTYLE" OF THEIR PAST BEHIND.

Christians are NONCONFORMISTS from a social standpoint in following Christ and are thus condemned from a social standpoint.

Yet Christ triumphed over demonic forces in 3:22 and thus Christ is their sure hope that their suffering will demonstrate that it is NOT they but their PERSECUTORS who will endure FINAL, DIVINE REJECTION.]

VIII. 1 Peter 4:6

We ought to consider briefly 4:6.

The "for" indicates that v. 6 is a JUSTIFICATION for what preceded in v. 5. [Eis touto points forward to the hina clause]

First, who is doing the preaching here? There is no subject for the verb "was preached." Some translations put in an understood "gospel," the "gospel was preached." But actually, this verb is used throughout the NT with Jesus Christ as the object. So most likely Jesus Christ is the subject of this passive verb. He was preached. [Note the similar use of the rare passive kerusso in 1 Cor. 15:12; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Tim. 3:16 that lends support.]

The latter half of verse is translated in the NRSV: "was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does." The "so that" is more likely "in order that." It is a final clause rather than result. The "dead" were "evangelized" IN ORDER THAT not only judgment but also life would result.

More literally, "although they were judged ... nevertheless [because of the evangelizing] they might live." What does it mean that they were judged? Since this is contrasted with living, there is a clearly negative thrust. The phrase translated "as everyone is judged" is better taken as "according to human opinions/standards" as opposed to the divine standard.

1) WHO PREACHED WHAT?;

2) what of the hina clause and its parallel construction;

3) The IDENTITY OF THE DEAD (nekrois); and

4) THE RELATION OF THIS VERSE TO 3:19.

Note the three formal parallels:

a. krithosi/zwsi

b. kata anthropous/kata theon

c. c. sarki/pneumati

a) Krino can mean "condemn" in the NT but can also mean simply "judge" in the broader sense (e.g. Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Tim. 4:1). The latter is the meaning in 1:17; 2:23; 4:5 (the immediately preceding verse!), BUT a NEGATIVE thrust is implied by THE CONTRAST WITH ZOSI. Whether it refers to final judgment, as in v. 5, is QUESTIONABLE given the remainder of the phrase. It would be peculiar to describe God's final judgment as taking place "in the flesh" and in some way related to human standards (kata anthropous). Its contrasting parallel, zosi, MUST refer to the TRUE OR ETERNAL LIFE, given the rest of the verse. Understanding death as the judgment on sin, while widespread, is not entirely relevant in this context, particularly if kata anthropous is taken to refer to the opinion of non-Christian contemporaries, since such an understanding of death would be foreign to them. The

condemnation here must be SOMETHING OTHER than death.

b) Kata theon means "in accord with God's will" (1 Peter 5:2; Rom 8:27) or "godly" (2 Cor. 7:9-11), while kata anthropon can mean "on a human level" (Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 15:32; Gal. 3:15) or "according to, or based on human standards" (1 Cor. 3:3; 9:8; Gal. 1:11). The formal parallelism requires comparable meanings and thus "according to human/according to divine standards" or "in the eyes of human beings/in the eyes of God." The author is referring to the ABUSE heaped on the Christians when judged by the abusers' standards.

c) The datives "flesh" and "spirit" display the same divine/human contrast as in 1:14-15; 2:4; 3:12; 4:2; 5:10. They are DATIVES OF SPHERE within which something occurs. Judgment occurs within the realm of human existence while life occurs within the realm of the divine. The latter is the final result of living in accord with the will of God (4:2).

3) Who are the "dead" to whom Christ preached? The SAME WORD FOR "DEAD" IS USED IN v. 5 IN REFERENCE TO THE FINAL JUDGMENT. So does v. 6 single out THESE dead to say more about their fate? THEY HEARD THE GOSPEL PREACHED IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD? Christ made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits but ALSO TO THE DEAD WHO DIED BEFORE THE INCARNATION? This would provide evidence for God's universal judgment according to the standard of the GOSPEL.

BUT: a) Nothing indicates that Christ is the one doing the preaching. He is more likely the subject matter than the agent of the preaching. Who then are we to understand did such preaching to the dead?

b) If the dead prior to the gospel, the gospel WOULD HAVE BEEN PREACHED TO THEM IN THE REALM OF THE DEAD, DISEMBODIED IN HADES. BUT THIS VIEW IS NOWHERE IN THE NT.

c) There is nothing to indicate the possibility of repentance and conversion after death, an idea foreign to the NT.

d) If proclamation to those who died PRIOR to Christ's advent justifies a universal final judgment on both the living and the dead, what of those who have died SINCE the advent of Christ without hearing the gospel? That would still pose a problem for universal judgment.

e) If v. 6 refers to final judgment, NO CONDEMNATION involved in it. The sole outcome is eternal life in the divine sphere; no mention of any rejection of those who have rejected Christ. That is quite foreign to the NT, where the final judgment is a time of separation of good from evil where all must give an account. 2 Peter 3:1 does NOT know of a single outcome at the judgment but recognizes a DOUBLE outcome (SEE 4:18)!

The difficulties are RESOLVED if we see the "DEAD" as NOT the physically dead but the SPIRITUALLY DEAD, the state of human beings prior to their acceptance of the gospel. Such a use for the word nekros for those who are, or were, spiritually dead is known to NT authors and is favored by some early Christian authors. BUT: this view departs completely from the context of FINAL JUDGMENT in v. 5 to which v. 6 is linked by gar, a context that clearly indicates that nekros refers to those physically dead. An explanation that honors the context would be preferable to one requiring a radical change of meaning.

An attractive alternative is that these are THE CHRISTIAN DEAD who during their lifetime heard and accepted the gospel but DIED PRIOR TO Christ's return. It would be like Thessalonica's problem, although not explicitly raised. Christians are suffering THE REJECTION OF THEIR NON-CHRISTIAN COUNTERPARTS FOR THEIR BELIEF. Christians who had suffered not only at the hands of their contemporaries but also DIED in the seeming fruitlessness of their beliefs and life of self-denial may nevertheless look forward to vindication. SEE WISDOM 3:2-4!! So, although undergoing in death a divine judgment on sin, they will nevertheless be awakened to live in the spiritual realm with God! That takes nekros in a more limited fashion in v. 6 than in v. 5, but allows v. 6 to function within the context of universal judgment.

4) The reference to a proclamation to the dead has led many to see here a relationship with 3:19 either in the sense that both refer to the same event, with nekros as the same as the pneumatata of 3:19, and the ekeruxen of that verse to be identified with the eueggelisthe here, or in the sense that what was limited to Noah's generation or to imprisoned spirits in 3:19 is broadened to the human dead as well in hearing the proclamation to the spirits or in Christ preaching in various places in Hades. BUT: 3:19 and 4:6 DIFFER IN LANGUAGE. CHRIST does the preaching in 3:19 but here he is THE SUBJECT of the preaching and no agent is mentioned. THE TWO VERBS ARE ENTIRELY DIFFERENT (kerusso; euangelizomai). Nor should the SUPERNATURAL pneumatata of 3:19 be equated with the clearly HUMAN nekros in this verse. THERE IS NO HINT OF LIMITATION TO THE TIME OF NOAH IN THIS VERSE AS IN 3:19. The emphasis here is on LAST JUDGMENT and the vindication of those who accepted Christ is totally different from 3:19 that is focused on the domination of Christ over all supernatural powers, with no reference to the last judgment. Thus: no connection between these two verses, and each ought to be understood in its own context apart from any reference to the other, lest damage be done to the author's intention in both verses.

Verse 6 does not justify God's right to judge the living and the dead, nor give further light on the obscure event in 3:19 but rather TO ENCOURAGE EMBATTLED CHRISTIANS TO ASSURE THEM THAT THEIR FAITH, DESPITE THEIR REJECTION BY HUMAN BEINGS AND THE DEATH THAT HAS OVERTAKEN SOME OF THEIR FELLOW BELIEVERS, HAS NOT BEEN IN VAIN. Rather, the same judgment that will require an account from those who have blasphemously opposed the Christians (v. 5a) will also see the vindication of those Christians who had undergone what appeared to their non-believing contemporaries to be the judgment of death, and hence the demise of all their hopes.

I would like to take an in-depth look in the next hour and a half at one text in particular, a very controversial one these days: In Galatians 3:27-28 Paul writes:

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Certainly this text has a favorite in discussions of women's roles in ministry. And we'll want to return to that topic at the end. But this text is significant for a number of reasons. First and most especially, we are likely dealing with an early Christian baptismal creed here. Second, it is very interesting to see how this baptismal creed functions within the argument of Paul's letter. As we see how it functions, we will gain a new and deeper understanding of baptism, and we'll also be able to evaluate the role that this verse plays in the debate over women in the ministry.

I. A Baptismal Creed

I mentioned to you the possibility of a baptismal creed. Let me give you the evidence for it. First, there is a convergence of elements here that we find in other places where Paul talks about baptism. Let me list them for you.

1. Baptism - As many of you as were baptized
2. Garment imagery - [you] have clothed yourselves with Christ
3. Pairs of opposites - Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female
4. Oneness - you are one in Christ Jesus.

Take a look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." 1. Baptism - we were baptized into one body 2. Garment imagery - missing 3. Pairs of opposites - Jew/Greek, slave/free 4. Oneness - the body is one.

And Colossians 3:10-11 (although not regarding Baptism): "[You] have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewing there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" 1. Baptism - missing, but see Col. 2:12 on being buried with Christ in baptism 2. Garment imagery - [you] have clothed yourselves with the new self 3. Pairs of opposites - Jew/Greek, circumcised/uncircumcised, slave/free 4. Oneness - Christ is all in all. This sort of formulaic language suggests the possibility of pre-Pauline material. But the best evidence for a baptismal creed is within Galatians itself.

Thus, a second line of evidence is that Paul's categories of opposites in Gal. 3:28 do not conform with the surrounding context. 1. Nowhere else does Paul mention "male" and "female" in this letter. 2. Jew/Greek, male/female, and "slave/free" - this cluster of six terms all refer to ordinary sociological realities. BUT: Paul uses slave/free in a SPIRITUALIZED sense throughout the rest of the letter for being in Christ or under the Law. The ordinary sociological sense in 3:28 departs from Paul's usage elsewhere in the letter. [unlike Jew/Greek] 3. Gal. 3:26-29 form an inclusio. Vv. 26, 29 both speak about being made heirs or children of Abraham or God in Christ.

What is the purpose, then, of this baptismal instruction at the center of this letter? The crucial issue in this letter is already in vv. 26 and 29. Who are the rightful heirs of God's promises? Paul answers that it is those who have been baptized and taken into a oneness with Christ. But to appreciate his point, we must take a look at the situation of the letter, the situation at Galatia.

II. The Cause of Paul's Concern: The Galatian Situation

One clue to the situation of this letter is in Paul's use of pronouns. Paul consistently refers to the Galatians with the second person plural: 1:6-9: I am astonished that YOU are so quickly deserting the one who called YOU in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel ... [look at all the you's in this section]- not that there is another gospel but there are some who are confusing YOU and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ...1:13: YOU have heard, no doubt, of my life in Judaism....4:12: Friends, I beg YOU, become as I am, for I also have become as YOU are. And notice how Paul describes the Galatians? 4:8: Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are no gods. The Galatians were Gentiles. While the Galatians themselves are Gentiles, there's another group at Galatia. Look at the third person pronouns that describe "CERTAIN" or "SOME others." 1:7: ... THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE CONFUSING YOU and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 5:12: I wish THOSE WHO UNSETTLE YOU ... [would castrate themselves] 6:13: Even THE CIRCUMCISED do not THEMSELVES obey the Law but THEY want YOU to be circumcised so that THEY may boast about YOUR flesh.

While we're in 6:13 we can begin to say something about the identity of these certain others. They were advocates of circumcision. Thus also 5:12: I wish those who unsettle you would CASTRATE themselves. The Gentiles used to deride the Jews for their practice of circumcision. They saw it as self-mutilation or castration. Paul is drawing on that language in reference to circumcision. Look at 4:21: Tell me, you who desire to be under the Law.... These advocates of circumcision must also have been pressing the Galatians to observe the Mosaic Law. In 4:8-10: Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. [9] Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again? YOU ARE OBSERVING SPECIAL DAYS, AND MONTHS, AND SEASONS, AND YEARS. [in other words, sabbaths, Passovers, festival of booths, New Year, Jubilee years, etc.] This outside group was encouraging the Jewish liturgical calendar.

And 1:6-9 is especially important:1:6-9: I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to A DIFFERENT GOSPEL-[7] NOT THAT THERE IS ANOTHER GOSPEL, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. Why would Paul even bother to call it a gospel in the first place only to have to correct himself. Rather, his OPPONENTS were calling their teaching the GOSPEL. In effect, they were Jewish CHRISTIANS. Thus 1:8-9 [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim A GOSPEL contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! [9] As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you A GOSPEL contrary to what you received,

let that one be accursed! These Jewish Christians were operating a competing missionary movement to the Gentiles alongside Paul's own. We see this especially in 4:19: 4:19: My little children, for whom I am again in pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. Notice that Paul speaks of himself as a MOTHER GIVING BIRTH. Keep Paul's self-description as a MOTHER GIVING BIRTH in mind as you read the verses that follow in 4:21-31, especially vv. 22-26 which I'll read to you: 4:21-31: [22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. [23] One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. [24] Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. [25] Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. [26] But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. Paul speaks of Abraham's two wives as MOTHERS GIVING BIRTH to two children, even as he had just spoken of HIMSELF as one who is GIVING BIRTH. Hagar is giving birth to slave-children. Sarah to the free. Hagar is associated, shockingly, with THE PRESENT JERUSALEM and MOUNT SINAI, while Sarah is associated with the Jerusalem above. (Paul never uses "Jerusalem" for the Jews in his writings. "Jerusalem" always refers either to the geographical city or the CHURCH there.) Paul is therefore opposing a competing Law-observant missionary movement that saw itself as derived from the Jerusalem church, a missionary movement that was operating parallel to Paul's own efforts at Galatia.

Let's compare these two missionary movements. One fact that I don't think we as Missouri Synod Lutherans are always that aware of is that there is a great deal of shared ground between Paul and his opponents. Let me show you what I mean.

III. Shared Ground But Diverging Views (2:15-16)

Gal. 2:15-16a is a crucial text because Paul cites in it as the basis for his own reasoning a shared confession that "we Jews" all "know." Paul is citing SHARED GROUND between himself and ALL OTHER JEWISH CHRISTIANS. Interestingly, this affirmation can be translated in two different ways. Let me give you the common translation of the verse. 2:15-16a: We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the Law BUT through faith in Jesus Christ.

1. "a person is not justified by the works of the Law [but, or but rather] a person is justified through faith in Christ" Paul certainly understands the affirmation this way. But he also seems to be recognizing an apparent ambiguity in the formulation. Notice how he restates the affirmation in unambiguously exclusive terms by the end of the verse. Paul quickly adds in the rest of v. 16: "And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law." Paul clearly states things by the end of the verse in a strong antithesis. Why would he do this? Simply because the initial formulation could have been read in a very different way. Let me translate 2:16a in differently, but in a manner equally appropriate to the Greek.

2. "a person is not justified by the works of the Law except through faith in Christ (and then one is justified by the works of the Law)" Paul's opponents would surely have taken the affirmation in this way and thus advocated that the Gentiles need to observe the Mosaic Law as part of their salvation. In other words, the Law DID SAVE when accompanied by faith in Christ. Now let me emphasize a point about this dispute that you may not have realized. Paul's opponents and he both agreed that one must have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. Let me repeat: Paul's opponents and he both agreed that one must have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. The issue is whether the Mosaic Law is an additional factor alongside faith in the Messiah for salvation. Paul's opponents interpreted the shared affirmation to say "Yes" with regard to the Mosaic Law, but Paul interpreted it differently.

Let me take a moment here and emphasize something. We see in Gal 2:16 that Paul's opponents were not "legalists." There's this very mistaken reading of Paul's opponents in Galatia as advocating a path to heaven through perfect obedience of God's Law. First, this is a caricature of Judaism at the time. There was certainly an element of proper behavior in justification for the Jews, but isn't there in Christianity as well? Take a look sometime at the motif of justification according to works in Romans 2. Rather, the Mosaic Law and its demands were always placed within the gracious framework of God's election and covenant with the people of Israel. An often-cited passage in the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1, says: "All Israelites have a share in the world to come." This emphasis on God's election of the people Israel is abundantly attested in the literature of inter-testamental Judaism. A place in the world to come was already secured merely by being a member of the elect people of Israel. The only exceptions to this rule in the Mishnah were those who deliberately forsook their relationship with God. Only the most egregious sinners were excluded, such as the Flood generation, or Korah who rebelled against Moses, for instance. The Mekilta, a rabbinic exegesis of Exodus tells the story of a man who offered to be a people's ruler. They asked: what have you done for us lately? So he rebuilds their walls, defends them from their enemies, provides a supply of water of food. So God delivered Israel from Egypt, offered them manna, quail and water in the wilderness. Only then did he ask to be their God and give them his commands. The Law came only AFTER Israel entered into a special relationship with God.

Consequently, the Jews did not agonize over salvation. Obedience to the Law was to be a response to God's election. Hardly a burden, obeying the commandments reminded the Jews that they were the chosen people and that the Lord was near. Nor need a member of God's people despair if he or she broke any of the laws. The Jews upheld a whole system of repentance, sacrifices and atonement for setting aright the situation caused by sin. The laws concerning sacrifice and atonement were meant to console and encourage consciences troubled by sin. They provided a means of receiving God's mercy and grace when confronted with human failure. Even those who abandoned the covenant could be restored if they repented of their sin. E. P. Sanders coined the now famous term "covenantal nomism" to describe this perspective. The Jews' observance of the Law's requirements, the "nomism," was always embedded in the framework of God's gracious election and covenant, along with the merciful provision of sacrifice and atonement for failure. Consequently, the Law became a sign of an elect people. Obedience to the Law circumscribed a people of grace. For Paul's opponents, Christ did not come to abolish the Law. One thinks of Matthew for instance. Rather, Christ is the fulfillment of the Law, and one is saved by faith in Christ, but within the confines of a Law-observant people of God. For Paul, the danger of this is that it adds a second factor into justification and compromises the efficacy of faith in Christ alone as we shall see in a moment. But first, let me show you the strength of Paul's opponents' case. They could rely on the Scriptures in their teaching!

IV. Shared Scriptures But Diverging Interpretations (3:10, 12; 3:6-7 [4:21-31]; 2:16)

One of the areas Paul's Galatian opponents may have been carrying the day was in the use of Scripture. Listen to the texts that Paul is discussing in Galatians. They are all texts that would have fitted much better his opponents' repertoire. Deut. 27:26; Lev. 18:5; Abrahamic texts (Gen. 17:5, 10); Ps. 143 3:10: For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the Law." (Deut. 27:26) Paul takes a passage that advocates observance of the Law and uses it to say the exact opposite. Heaven forbid you observe the Law, you may just end up under its curse. So why bother? In 3:12: But the Law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, "Whoever DOES the works of the Law will LIVE by them." (Lev. 18:5) Lev. 18:5 promotes observance of the Law for salvation. Paul negates the passage by juxtaposing it with another one. [3:11: "The one who is righteous will live by faith."] (Hab. 2:4) (I wonder if this passage too was part of his opponents' repertoire. While Paul interprets faith as believing trust, what if the word should be translated "faithfulness". "The one who is righteous will live by faithfulness." Again, it sounds like a proof-text for the opponents.)

3:6-7: Just as Abraham "believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" [Gen. 15:6], [7] so, you see, those who believe are descendants of Abraham. [8] And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." [9] For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. Paul points to passages highlighting Abraham's belief but ignores the more likely connection between Abraham's covenant, the GENTILES, and CIRCUMCISION in Genesis 17. CIRCUMCISION WAS TO BE THE SIGN OF GOD'S COVENANT OF PROMISE WITH ABRAHAM!! After God says that he is establishing an everlasting covenant with Abraham and his offspring, TO BE THEIR GOD, listen to vv 10-14. [10] This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: EVERY MALE AMONG YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED. [11] You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. [12] Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. [13] Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. [14] Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Paul's opponents would have said that the children of Abraham are those who are circumcised, given Genesis 17. Paul completely ignores the passage, since it would support his opponents' case. Consider Ps. 143 in Gal. 2:16. Ps. 143:2b: ... for no one living is righteous before you. Paul ignores Ps. 143:8b, 10b: Ps. 143:8b, 10b: Teach me the WAY I should go; Teach me to do your WILL. Cf. Pss. 119:1; 40:9; 18:22-24

V. The Attractiveness of the Opposing Viewpoint

1. Scriptural precedent

2. Continuity with God's Law (cf. 3:19-20) 3:19: Why then the Law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; AND IT WAS ORDAINED THROUGH ANGELS BY A MEDIATOR. [20] Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.

3. Offers a much more concrete approach to the Christian life. How were the Galatians to live? Paul does not offer a very detailed approach. Paul's opponents would surely have seen this as a license for "lawlessness," for SIN. They would have encouraged the Galatians to live along the concrete path of the Mosaic Law. His opponents would have encouraged believers to serve God through the precepts of the Mosaic Law. Much of what Paul has to say about the role of the Spirit in the Christian life in Gal 5:22-23 seems to be a response to the attractiveness of the Mosaic Law in Christian living. For Paul's opponents, the solution to the Christian life lies in circumcision as the beginning of a life of obedience under the Law. Notice how Paul's teachings in Galatians 5 are carefully enclosed by Paul's attack on circumcision in 5:1-12 and 6:11-17! 5:3 - Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire Law.

6:13a - Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the Law.

5:6 - For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.

6:15 - For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!

5:11 - But my friends, why am I still being persecuted if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed.

6:12 - It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised-only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Both sections, 5:1-12 and 6:11-17, form an inclusio around Paul's ethical admonitions in 5:13-6:10. In effect, the approach to the Christian life does NOT lie in circumcision and the Law, but in THE SPIRIT.

Paul says instead that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control. It may not be as detailed or structured as the Mosaic Law, but it is still the way of the Spirit. Anyone who lives in this way will be doing what the Law had been getting at all along. They will be living according to what Paul calls in Gal. 6:2 "the LAW OF CHRIST."

VI. The Danger

The real danger for Paul is simply that the Law can't save. He says as much in 3:21:

3:21: Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! FOR IF A LAW HAD BEEN GIVEN THAT COULD MAKE

ALIVE, THEN RIGHTEOUSNESS WOULD INDEED COME THROUGH THE LAW.

But even further, to adopt an approach consistent with the Mosaic Law would compromise the value of saving faith in Christ. Listen to 2:21:

2:21: I do not nullify the grace of God; FOR IF JUSTIFICATION COMES THROUGH THE LAW, THEN CHRIST DIED FOR NOTHING.

Paul is so vehement and extreme in his language, because in his mind any principle alongside faith in Christ in salvation jeopardizes the awesome new thing that God was doing in Christ. The Law simply never saved. Christ alone saves, and to place another principle alongside Christ is to compromise the saving value of faith in Christ.

VII. Paul's Apocalyptic Perspective

Ultimately, Paul's attitude toward the Law is motivated by his view that in Christ a NEW APOCALYPTIC REALITY has INVADED THE COSMOS, a world that had been previously characterized by the Law. Right after he contrasts his opponents' urging of circumcision, he explains that his own boast is in the cross of Christ. He writes in Gal. 6:14-15:

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which The World has been crucified to me, and I to The World. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a NEW CREATION is everything! Paul speaks of TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS. By participating in Christ's death we are taken from one world and its reality into another. Circumcision/uncircumcision, on the other hand, is part of the OLD reality

Circumcision and uncircumcision are part of the PAIRS OF OPPOSITES that characterize the OLD WORLD. Greek thought saw the elements in pairs: earth and water; fire and air. (or earth and air; fire and water?) Likewise in Gal. 3:27-28: there is neither Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female. ANOTHER set of pairs of opposites are done away with by our being ONE with Christ: "For you are, all of you, One in Christ Jesus." But the OLD WORLD IS WAGING A WAR AGAINST THE NEW WORLD. In 5:16-17:

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other. [i.e. a DIFFERENT PAIR OF OPPOSITES, a battle between elements of this world vs. the invading world to come] In other words, the old world has not been done away with yet, but is waging a war against the inbreaking new world. So in Gal. 4:21-31 Paul shows TWO JERUSALEMS, one below and one above, a child born in SLAVERY and one in FREEDOM, one in the FLESH and one in the SPIRIT. The New Creation in the Spirit is at war with the world of the flesh.

As Paul opens his Epistle in 1:3-4:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from THE PRESENT EVIL AGE, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever.

Paul's opposition of the Law is based on the Law dividing the world in JEW AND GENTILE, i.e. THOSE WITH THE LAW and THOSE WITHOUT THE LAW. These distinctions according to Gal 3:28 are done away with by our unity through faith in Christ. A new reality has dawned, a new oneness in Christ, a new Creation. The old divisions and distinctions of this age have passed away. The true antidote to the urges of the Flesh in the concrete Christian life is NOT THE LAW, AN ALLY OF THE FLESH AS WE SEE IN ROMANS 7, BUT THE POWER OF THE NEW AGE, THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.

Baptism is therefore the solution to the problem of the Flesh. It offers along with faith a power by taking the believer into Christ and with Christ the Spirit. The key element is the aspect of oneness. We become members of a new reality by being taken into a ONENESS with Christ. It is as if we were one person. Note Gal. 3:28's language: it is a masculine pronoun! And with oneness in Christ comes the Spirit. Since we are children of God through faith in Christ, Gal. 4:6 says that we are granted the Spirit, and yet in 4:29 it is the Spirit that MADE us children. The paradox is resolved in the oneness of the moment in Christ. And with the Spirit comes an apocalyptic power that truly wages war against the flesh. This is precisely the danger of the opponents' viewpoint according to 3:1-5. They are losing sight, in their focus on the Law, that the same Spirit with which they began is the key to their continuing battles against the Flesh.

Another sideways glance at Romans confirms this strong focus on baptismal ethics in Galatians. Romans 6 affirms that we have been buried with Christ in baptism and thus have entered into a new age, the age of Christ as opposed to Adam to use the language of Romans 5. And yet as quickly as Paul affirms this once for all entry into a new reality, he can turn around in Rom. 6:12 and following and offer the Romans the imperatives that flow out of the baptismal indicative:

"Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies to obey their passions."

And by v. 14 Paul returns to the indicative yet again: "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace."

Paul is constantly affirming the indicative of a new reality and then pointing to the need to see that reality affirmed in our daily lives. That is precisely what is going on in Galatians. Baptism has taken us into a new apocalyptic reality bound up in our oneness and identity in Christ. In chapters 5-6 we see how this new Spirit-filled reality is to actualize itself in practice and in combat against the Flesh, the old realities.

VIII. The Concrete Application of Baptismal Oneness with Christ

But we still haven't addressed how does this oneness in Christ and the power of the Spirit work themselves out concretely in

Christian living? Abolition of slavery? Abolition of Jew-Gentile distinctions? WOMEN IN MINISTRY?

To turn to a different text for a moment, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-24 Paul takes up each of the categories that he treated here. In vv. 10-16 he addresses husbands and wives (men/women), in vv. 17-20, the circumcised and uncircumcised, and in vv. 21-24 the slave and free. Does he abolish these social relations?

In 1 Cor. 7:10-16 Paul addresses husbands and wives who were in difficult circumstances where one partner may not be a believer. Vv.10-11 says that the two should not separate or get divorced. Where some of the Corinthians were advocating celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, Paul says "No." Being in Christ does NOT mean that one should abandon the marriage relationship. V. 17 says, rather, that they should lead a life in the relationships into which God has called them. In v. 18 Paul urges the circumcised not to abandon their circumcision. Likewise, the uncircumcised should not seek circumcision. In v. 19 neither of these states provides any special benefits before God. Being a Jew or Greek is not abolished, but the relationships no longer carry significance with respect to status before God. In vv. 21-23 Paul says that if one became a Christian as a slave, he is free in the Lord. But if one were free as a Christian, then he is a slave of Christ. In v. 24 one should stay where God calls. Being a slave or free person does not count for anything "in the Lord."

The issue is one's relationship with God in Christ and not our social situation per se. Likewise, nothing in Gal. 3:28 advocates an elimination of these social differences. In fact, the wording of "there is neither male nor female" is literally "there is neither male AND female." This is the language of GENESIS. "MALE AND FEMALE God created them" (Gen. 1:27). In fact, this is the language of Adam's relationship with Eve, his WIFE.

Would anyone wish to contend that in the Pauline vision for those in Christ, there is no longer the marriage relationship? Hardly, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 7: it's better to marry than to burn, right? But what is really fascinating about all this is that the categories mentioned within the baptismal creed in Galatians 3:28 are precisely those distinctions made by the MOSAIC LAW.

Salvation in the Old Testament came within the confines of Israel and its God. You had to be a Jew and not a Gentile. That meant that there could be no mixed marriages with Gentiles. Those who were slaves could not serve as priests in the Temple's holiness structure. Likewise also women were excluded from many acts of service to God. They were exempt from saying the Shema or wearing phylacteries, for instance. In later rabbinic thought Rabbi Jehuda said, One must speak three praises every day:

Blessed be God that he has not made me a Gentile!
Blessed be God that he has not made me a woman!
Blessed be God that he has not made me a boor [i.e. person of the land, regular type]!

Blessed be God that had not made me a Gentile "because all Gentiles are nothing before him" (Jer. 40:17). Blessed be God that he had not made me a woman: Because woman is not obligated to fulfill the commandments, Blessed be God that he has not made me a boor: Because a boor is not ashamed to sin.

In the Babylonian Talmud a fourth element is added: that one was not made a SLAVE.

Yet where the Law would have made these distinctions, they are done away with IN CHRIST because THE LAW is done away with. WHERE CIRCUMCISION AND THE LAW HAD SEPARATED, BAPTISM NOW UNITES AND BRINGS TOGETHER.

But that does not answer what sort of life people should lead in Christ. Is the Christian life revolutionary? We have seen that it is not. Paul still respects the distinction between Jew and Gentile as we see in Romans 9-11. He still recognizes a marriage relationship. He does not tell Onesimus to run away and be free. How then should we characterize the new Christian life?

First of all, there ARE implications with being in Christ. Being in Christ does not stop with our salvation. The implications of a life in the Spirit are thus given in Gal. 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is the solution to the lusts of the flesh. And note the internal character of much of this: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Nothing indicates social revolution and equality. Rather, by exercising THESE attributes, we are a "NEW CREATION" in Christ. Christ's apocalyptic work takes place FROM WITHIN. It is TRANSFORMATIVE from within rather than revolutionary from without. It is hidden IN CHRIST. It is a hidden work of the Spirit that invades the ordinary world, and this activity cannot be seen apart from faith in Christ.

The danger of Paul's opponents was that they were tearing Christians away from the Spirit into a renewed focus on the Law. But the Spirit creates a renewed focus on CHRIST. Thus in Gal. 3:1 Paul has to remind the Galatians of the portrayal of Christ crucified.

When we see ourselves IN CHRIST, sure, we may go about the same social relations as before, but we are no longer the same. We exercise our social roles in a way that exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit. Imagine a husband who manifested these qualities. Where would be the rub? The oneness in Christ that baptism creates does not remove our roles. 1 Corinthians 12 catalogs a number of roles even while talking about our oneness in Christ through baptism. But we see in Galatians that all our earthly roles have been TRANSFORMED by the presence of the Spirit. The master treats the slave as a fellow brother and vice versa. The husband treats the wife as Christ the church. The Jew welcomes the Gentile to a fellowship in the Lord and vice versa.

If we want to see what baptismal oneness leads to concretely in Gal. 3:28, we need only turn the page in Galatians. We will then see what this Spirit who took us into a oneness in Christ in baptism now is doing in the lives of believers. The real power for the Christian life lies in the Spirit who came through our oneness in Christ thanks to baptism. Paul is admonishing us to recognize this to draw upon more actively the power of the Spirit in our daily lives.

The Holy Spirit did not come to us through the Mosaic Law. No, the Holy Spirit came to us as a privilege through our baptisms. We have been transformed. We are no longer the same as who we once had been.

INFANT BAPTISM

I opened our time together telling you about my discussions in college with the lady I was dating at that time. I'd like to tell you a little more about that relationship all those years ago.

The most difficult aspect of our interdenominational encounter was not so much the charismatic gifts, but infant baptism. The real issue was what to do should we ever get married and have children. From her perspective, infant baptism was a meaningless ritual since infants didn't have the faith that was necessary to benefit from the baptism. To placate me, we could baptize them as babies but only provided we baptized them again later on when they were old enough to believe for themselves.

But you can imagine that while this provisional two-baptism plan was a fine compromise in our discussions at the time, neither of us felt right about it.

The infant baptism book that I wrote, *Baptized Into God's Family*, sprang out of these discussions on the topic. It began initially as a 4-page list of reasons for infant baptism. She read through the four pages and sent them back to me with all sorts of comments on them, mainly along the lines that none of the passages spoke about infant baptism and babies simply didn't have faith.

I then wrote a 16-page revision, but she only read the first four pages and decided that they were no better than the four-page original. We never got any further than that.

After that encounter, I considered it truly a blessing these last few years when I met the wife that the Lord truly had in store for me. But the Lord used this situation to move me to try to put together a resource for pastors and parents involved in these sorts of interdenominational situations, for people who need an accessible biblical defense of why we baptize babies.

Within a few years the Lord saw fit to bring about this book on infant baptism. For my last hour with you, I'd like to focus on infant baptism. Some of what I have to say may be obvious to you as pastors who are regularly teaching the Scriptures. My prayer is that this hour will offer you at least an additional insight or two to supplement your teaching. But please bear with me as we talk about this very precious topic, as we talk about the waters that bring salvation to our infants and small children.

What greater topic could there be than this? That mere water could save our beloved children and babies. Let me begin by giving you a brief overview of where we've been and then where I'd like to go. In our first three sessions we looked at several texts.

We looked at baptism all throughout the book of Acts. We then looked at 1 Peter 3:21, John 3:5-8, Gal. 3:28 and, briefly, Rom. 6:1-6 and 1 Cor. 12:13. We saw in Acts that Luke clearly ties together the reception of God's forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit with water baptism. 1 Peter 3:21 indicated that baptism actually saves through the power not of the individual but of the resurrected Christ. John 3:5-8 indicated that the effects of being in the flesh could only be countered by water and Spirit, by a baptism that brings with it the power of the Spirit. Gal. 3:28 likewise spoke of the putting on of Christ that happens in and through baptism. Similarly Romans 6 indicated that one participates in Christ's death through baptism.

Throughout the New Testament, over and over again, as we have seen, the effects of sin and the flesh are clearly countered by the rite of baptism. While faith is certainly necessary in the New Testament for the new life in Christ, these passages are striking for the way in which they single out the necessity of baptism. But that naturally leads to this hour's topic: If baptism is the means by which sin is countered, what of infants?

In our society and culture, it is difficult to conceive of a baby as a sinner. Nevertheless, Scripture is very clear about the matter. Job 14:1 says: "A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble." Or in Ps. 58:3: "the wicked go astray from the womb; they err from their birth, speaking lies." Rom 3:23, that famous verse from the catechism: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The problem is that the situation does not get any better as we get older, as we reach the infamous age of accountability. It seems to only get worse. In 1 Cor. 15:50: "... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." Likewise in 1 Cor. 2:14: "Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." In Rom. 8:7-8: "For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those are in the flesh cannot please God." In other words, sin is a genuine dilemma that requires a miraculous solution.

God has simply promised that baptism will resolve that dilemma. It is much like that story in 2 Kings 5. Elisha instructs the leprous Naaman to go wash in the Jordan seven times and he would be clean. Naaman grows angry with these instructions. In v. 11: "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy." But Naaman's servant spoke to him in v. 13: "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?' We have the same dilemma in our modern culture today. Many of us have a hard time believing in the possibility of genuine, supernatural miracles. They just aren't part of our everyday experience. And yet according to Scripture that is precisely what baptism is—a MIRACLE.

How different is this from Naaman's situation to be faced with mere water as the conveyer of the miracle of healing and salvation. But Naaman is one thing. The rub in it all is when we come to infants. How can an INFANT have the faith that Scripture speaks of that is part of salvation?

The tragic irony is that we begin to assume that our conscious faith is somehow the product of our own acceptance or decision. But

we lose track of the fact that faith throughout the New Testament is always a miracle of God.

Let me illustrate this point with three New Testament witnesses: Luke, John, and Paul. Luke tells us over and over again that we must repent in order to receive the kingdom of God. Acts 2:38 says REPENT and be baptized. Similarly, take a look at Luke 5:32. Jesus says: "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners TO REPENTANCE."

Now take a look at Mark 2:17. There's not a word about repentance (unless you're looking at the KJV). It's not in Matthew either (Mt. 9:13). On the other hand, repentance is a central motif in Luke's writings (e.g. 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 26:18-20). So how can a mere baby repent? But there's more to Luke's emphasis on repentance. Take a look at Acts 5:31: "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that HE MIGHT GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL and forgiveness of sins." And Acts 11:18: "When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God HAS GIVEN even to the Gentiles THE REPENTANCE that leads to life.'"

For Luke, it is God who "GIVES" repentance. In Luke 3:3, baptism is FOR the forgiveness of sins. In Luke 3:6, John interprets his baptismal message as the dawning of the salvation OF GOD. This is an era that was not possible apart from God. As impossible as it may seem for infants to repent, Luke explains that repentance is equally impossible for adults as well. Repentance is simply a gift or miracle of God.

This is a major motif in John as well. In John 15:16: "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..." Even in John's programmatic prologue, in vv. 12-13: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, NOT OF BLOOD OR OF THE WILL OF THE FLESH OR OF THE WILL OF MAN, BUT OF GOD." The words of the prologue here prepare for the introduction of several characters in John's narrative who just can't quite get it, and yet their misunderstanding is entirely "natural."

Jesus will call his flesh true food and his blood true drink in John 6. Understandably the people listening think he is talking about cannibalism. I mean what would you think if you heard all this? It really forces us to realize how incredible it was that anyone could have believed in Jesus, from a human standpoint, that is.

In Eph. 2:9-10. By grace we are saved... it's not of works..." This is where the Lutheran understanding of predestination comes into play. In Eph. 1:4-5: "... he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of HIS WILL." Another powerful passage is in Rom. 10:14-15, 17: "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' ... So FAITH COMES FROM WHAT IS HEARD, and what is heard through the word of Christ."

Thus faith is a miraculous result of the Word of God. In fact, in Gal. 3:2, 5: the translations often botch this phrase in the Greek, *akoes pisteos*. It's not the "hearing of faith." Rather, Paul is referring to the message that EVOKES faith. In v. 6 Paul goes on about Abraham's faith, his believing (*pisteuo*). So *pistis* in 3:2 and 5 should be taken as believing faith (and NOT "the" objective faith).

Then in 3:1 we have the objective message of Christ crucified. Now *akoes* can mean "hearing" or "message." After the objective presentation of Christ crucified in 3:1, *akoes* is most likely "message." i.e. the message of 3:1 of Christ crucified. Putting all this together we end up with "the message that EVOKES faith."

Or for another example, consider Rom. 9:16: "So it depends not on HUMAN WILL or exertion, but on God who shows mercy." Or in Phil. 2:12-13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to WILL and to work for his good pleasure."

Given these strong motifs all throughout the New Testament, we can see that it is no more possible for an adult to receive faith than it is for an infant. As the disciples asked Jesus in Matt. 19:25: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answers in v. 26: "For mortals this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." What seems humanly impossible is possible only for GOD. But even more than that, we find throughout Scriptures that God holds up infants and small children as our examples as to how to receive faith.

In Matt. 18:1: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" Here are the disciples jockeying over their status as disciples. Then in vv. 2-3 Jesus places a child in their midst: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is admonishing his DISCIPLES, and he tells them that children are our EXAMPLES for how to enter the kingdom of heaven. Adults must become LIKE CHILDREN. Then Matt. 19:13-15 the disciples again rebuke parents bringing children to Jesus. Jesus responds: "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And again, it is in the context of such discussion of little children that we have in Matt. 19:26: "For mortals this is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

Luke 18:15-17 is the parallel account of this. Notice Luke's language in v. 15: they were bringing INFANTS to Jesus! "For it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." So we should not be surprised that throughout the Scriptures, infants are ascribed believing faith, believe it or not.

In Matthew 18 after speaking about small children as our examples of how to receive the kingdom of God, Jesus refers in v. 6 to "these little one, which BELIEVE in me." These little ones BELIEVE in Jesus! This is a real stumbling block for those who do say that babies cannot believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Or in the words of Ps. 71:5-6: "For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb." Or in Matt. 21:15-16: "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became angry and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to

them, "Yes, have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?""

In Luke 1:15, it is said of John the Baptist: "...even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." Then in v. 41: "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb." Elizabeth exclaims in v. 44: "For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy."

But faith is also the ONLY way to be saved according to Eph. 2:8-9 and Rom. 10:9-12, 14: "...because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The Scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'" ... 'For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" But all this raises a problem. How can we know which baby to baptize? Which one has the faith necessary for baptism?

What Jesus tells us in Matthew and Luke about infants and small children provides a wonderful response to this question. If Jesus offers infants and small children to us adults as our examples as to how to receive the kingdom throughout Matthew, then we can be absolutely certain that they will receive the grace offered in baptism, even more so than an adult. After all, they're our examples for how to receive God's kingdom.

Now all this does not get us out of the responsibility as adults that our infants are to be subsequently brought up in the faith. Eph. 6:4 tells us that our responsibilities don't end with infant baptism. What began as an infant faith must mature even as the person matures. Children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The danger is that an infant's faith would not mature, and the infant could fall away from faith. An infant faith must mature even as the rest of the child. The child needs not only physical food to grow up. An infant falling away from faith sounds drastic, but several passages warn of believers falling away:

In Matt. 13:5-7, 18, 20-22 we read in the parable of the sower, and I ask you to listen to this from the perspective of falling away from faith: "Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. . Hear then the parable of the sower. ... As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing." Lest there be any doubt about falling away, keep a hand in Matthew and then look at how Luke explains the parable of the sower in Luke 8:13: "The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they BELIEVE only for a while and in a time of testing fall away." We know that this is saving belief from the prior verse: "The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not BELIEVE AND BE SAVED."

Thus, believers can fall away from their faith. Similarly in 2 Pet. 2:20-22: "For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have KNOWN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS than, AFTER KNOWING IT, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'The dog turns back to its own vomit,' and 'The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.'" Falling from the faith is a repeated motif all throughout Hebrews. For example, in Heb. 6:4-6: "For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been ENLIGHTENED, and HAVE TASTED THE HEAVENLY GIFT, and HAVE SHARED THE HOLY SPIRIT, and have TASTED the goodness of the word of God and the POWERS OF THE AGE TO COME, and then having fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and holding him up to contempt. Heb. 10:26-27: "For if we willfully persist in sin AFTER HAVING RECEIVED THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

Now I have really emphasized this because many of the same people who deny infant baptism often affirm the view that once you become a Christian you can never fall away. And when they look at the poor witness of many baptized as babies, they deduce that infant baptism never really saved them. Thus Eph. 6:4 admonishes parents to bring their children up in "the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Deut. 6:7 instructs the Israelites to teach their children the way of the Lord. Even adults need to be reminded and taught the meaning of their baptism.

In Rom. 6:3-4 Paul finds it necessary to even remind the Roman adults about the meaning of their baptisms: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Quite apart from baptism's ability to create faith in the infant, baptism is also commanded in Matt. 28:18-20. As we have seen, infants figured prominently all throughout Matthew's narrative. We saw this in Matthew 18 and 19, and then 21.

Along with all the other "non-people" who receive faith throughout the narrative and are welcomed into the kingdom, we find infants being welcomed into God's kingdom So by the time we get to Matthew 28's command to baptize all nations, everyone, it is very clear who Jesus had in mind for inclusion into God's kingdom.

Along with Christ's command, there is also the parallel Paul sees between baptism and circumcision in Col. 2:11-13: "In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses...." How could anyone read this when infants were the primary recipients of circumcision and not think of baptizing infants? And yet Paul does not qualify his remarks.

Further, adults receiving baptism after coming to faith would mirror Abraham's receiving circumcision as a sign of his faith. But we always remember that circumcision, this sign of faith, was for the infants in Abraham's household as well.

One last point: the households in Acts. It is common to talk about how infants and children were included in the ancient concept of the household and so when the Bible talks about households getting baptized that would have to include the infants.

I would like to take line of reasoning one step further to even firmer ground. As we read through the baptism of households in Acts, it is a recurrent motif that salvation and baptism were intended for EVERYONE in the household. Listen to how Acts 11:14 describes the conversion and baptism of Cornelius' household. The angel had proclaimed that Peter would come to their household and "what he will... and EVERYBODY... " he will give you a message by which you and your ENTIRE household will be saved." In the baptism of the jailer's household in Acts 16, listen to vv.30-31 and then 33: "Then he brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' ... At the same hour of night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his ENTIRE family were baptized without delay." Acts 18:8 tells of the baptism of Crispus' household: "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with ALL his household...."

This constant emphasis on ALL the household being baptized makes Luke's point about baptism. It is simply intended for ALL. Whether there were infants present in these specific instances in Acts or not is irrelevant. Luke unequivocally describes the concern as for EVERYONE. There would have been no question in antiquity about who should be included. Although we must admit that the presence of infants and small children was likely given the size of the ancient household which included also the slaves and their children. The earliest church fathers accepted infant baptism without any question or debate. When debate does show up in the evidence, those disagreeing with the practice of baptizing infants, such as Tertullian, fully admit that it had been the practice since the apostles. It had simply been assumed up to that point.

When I wrote *Baptized Into God's Family*, I put together a summary on pp. 109-113 that I hoped pastors and parents could use for a quick overview of the reasons for infant baptism with friends and non-Lutherans as a basis for discussion. I refer you to that discussion.

I hope that you will find this a helpful resource, especially as you counsel parents prior to the baptism of a baby so that the parents and family will understand exactly what God is doing in infant baptism and what it all means for the child. Or that you would have a quick resource to offer non-Lutherans who are questioning the doctrine. At the time, I wish I had had something like this when I was in college. But alas, God always has His own timing, and in retrospect we realize that His timing is always the best timing. I'm sure my wife would agree.

Thank you again for letting me come and speak with you. I have enjoyed being in your midst and you all have been a great blessing to me and my wife. Thank you!

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