

From: Brian Harns <bharns@yahoo.com>  
To: bill@bi bleweb.com  
Subject: baptisms  
Date: Wed, 9 Jun 1999

Bill,

I was attracted to your website by your history of denominations chart. To my present understanding it is pretty accurate.

I looked around your web-site a bit more, and found much of your doctrines to be in error. Please consider...

Water baptism is not necessary for salvation (the born-again) experience for remission of sins. There are many, many examples in the Bible you have ignored (hopefully out of ignorance). Did the thief on the cross obtain salvation? Certainly, he did not have an opportunity to be baptized in water? Yet Jesus said today you will be with me in paradise. Why? because he acknowledged Jesus as Lord, his own sinfulness, and by inference repented as well (Rom 10:9,10)

To the sick man, Jesus said "thy sins be forgiven thee". Was not his sins forgiven him at that time? Jesus neglected to mention baptism in water.

Was there any salvation before the baptism of John? How? What is in the water that forgives sin anyway? Nothing... At least Catholics believe their water is holy. Reason, logic, and scripture revolt against all these things... Often scriptures that refer to the Word of God are distorted to mean water baptism. Have you not read of the washing of the water of the Word? The Word of God is often referred to as water...

What is water baptism? It is exactly what Peter said it was in I Peter 3:21. It does not put away the filth of the flesh, but it is the answer of a good conscience toward God. Christians should be water baptised as an outward act to demonstrate before God, the world, and other Christians that they have crucified the old sinful man and have made Jesus lord of their life.

It is unfortunate that you do not believe in a Biblical baptism in the Holy Spirit as well. Jesus thought the baptism of the Holy Spirit was so important and critical to empower his believers that he told them not to go out into the world until they received the Holy Spirit (being evidence by speaking in tongues).

You do not question that Christians were baptised in water though all the Christians and all the specific occurrences are not mentioned in the Bible. Why do you then question the baptism in Holy Spirit? The new testament church is one church that should be thinking, believing, confessing, and acting like the beginning new testament church. How grieved God must be to see so many people reject the person of the Holy

Spirit...

Please do not take this lightly. How can you believe you are in right-standing with God when you reject His Holy Spirit? I do not represent or attend any specific church or denomination so I'm not trying to convert people to any man's system of religion. I'm just a Bible student, and want to reach people with the truth of the Word.

I hope you will consider these things...

Brian

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Reply to: Brian Harns  
From: Bill Blue  
Date: June 28, 1999

Dear Brian,

Thank you for your email. If you have no objection, I would like to post your message and my reply on my web site.

You wrote:

"I looked around your web-site a bit more, and found much of your doctrines to be in error. ... I do not represent or attend any specific church or denomination so I'm not trying to convert people to any man's system of religion. I'm just a Bible student, and want to reach people with the truth of the word. ... I hope you will consider these things...."

I appreciate your candor and willingness to point out error. I find people like you, who are willing to study and discuss God's word, encouraging. Although I have carefully considered your arguments, I find that I am unable to agree with most of your conclusions. I hope, however, that you will consider my defense of the notion that baptism is required by Christ, as recorded in the Scriptures, for salvation.

First, let me give you a little background on myself.

I am a member of the church of Christ, though I was not "raised in the church." Rather, I was raised a Methodist who believed that all men who believed in Christ would be saved, and once saved, your entrance to Heaven was sealed forever; you couldn't fall from grace. I have since learned that these beliefs are not supported by Scripture. I

have always believed in God and I have never really ever doubted His existence. When I was 18, my parents and I attended Sunday school classes together at a local, prominent Methodist Church, the First United Methodist Church in Perry, Florida. During these classes, I started to realize that my brethren did not accept the literal meaning of what we read each week in class, but looked for some other deeper meaning, or explained inconsistencies away by noting that times had changed. Whenever I had a troubling question and asked a teacher for help, they would always respond the same way, "What do you believe or feel is right?" I didn't know much Bible back then, but four things I knew for certain: The Bible is the word of God, He is my Creator, He decides whether I will go to Heaven, and it doesn't matter what I think. So, I started to study what friends of mine in the church of Christ were saying because they would at least give me a Bible answer for a Bible question. After much examination (3½ years), I decided that they were right and the denominations were all wrong for one doctrinal reasons or another. This conclusion inevitably came back to one of two truths: The denominations either do not follow what the Bible says, but rather rely on what others (*e.g.*, preachers) tell them, or they follow only those portions they are comfortable with. They never follow the whole truth.

Do me this one favor when considering my rebuttal. Study the passages for yourself, and do not listen to one word of reason that isn't support by Scripture, whether it is espoused by me, or anyone you know and trust. Put your trust in God's word, and obey everything it says.

Consider this also before we go forward. If I am wrong and water baptism is not necessary for salvation, then the results of my error is that people will have to dry off one more time in their life. True, if I am wrong, I will be responsible to God for preaching error, however, no one else will be condemned for believing they had to be baptized for the remission of sins. If, however, you are wrong, you, and everyone who believes you, will spend an eternity of suffering in Hell because they will either not be baptized, or they will be baptized for the wrong reason (Cf. Acts 19:1-5), denying that it was necessary for salvation. **So, at the outset, can we at least agree that the consequences of you being wrong are much more severe than the consequences of me being wrong?**

"Water baptism is not necessary for salvation (the born-again) experience for remission of sins."

I respectfully disagree. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16), and "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3)." How are we born again? Jesus, again, says "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5)."

I have heard many arguments about how to interpret "water and the Spirit" and I am convinced that it is referring to voluntary submission to water baptism. This is how

Peter says we receive the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and salvation (1 Peter 3:21, “an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism”).

"There are many, many examples in the bible you have ignored (hopefully out of ignorance)."

Respectfully submitted, I do not believe that I have overlooked any passage and I am willing to read any passage you suggest. The Bible says many things save you. I believe that they are all necessary. **I do not believe I can simply choose the passage(s) or commandment(s) that I like, but must do all of the things commanded.** In other words, I must COMPLETELY obey God in ALL things.

For example, obviously grace saves us (Ephesians 2:5), so does faith (John 3:16), and so does baptism (1 Peter 3:21). I believe that we cannot take advantage of God's grace unless we do all of the things God commands, to wit: hear (Rom. 10:14, 17), believe (Rom. 10:9-10, 13), confess (Rom. 10:9-10, 13), repent (Acts 2:38), be baptized (Mark 16:16) and continue to obey (Matt. 7:21; 1 Cor. 9:27, 10:12; Heb. 6:6; Acts 8:5-24). The Bible mentions many other things that also save us (*e.g.*, endurance Matt. 10:22, hope Rom. 8:24, confession Rom. 10:9, etc.). **The question becomes which passage(s) do you believe we can ignore or leave out (Rev. 22:18-19)?**

"Did the thief on the cross obtain salvation?"

Yes, Christ said so.

"Certainly he did not have an opportunity to be baptized in water?"

The thief on the cross argument simply questions whether baptism is necessary for salvation because there is no record of the thief being baptized. Of course, there is no evidence to the contrary either, meaning he may have received the baptism of John which was also for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). The text does suggest, however, that the thief knew who Jesus was (Luke 23:42).

The proponents of this argument fail to realize that the New Testament that we are all under today did not take effect until after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Remember, Paul said that without the resurrection of Christ, our faith would be in vain (1 Cor. 15:14,17). The writer in Hebrews also reminds us “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth” (Hebrews 9:16-17). **Therefore, since the thief was living during the**

**era of the Old Testament, baptism in the name of Christ was not required for salvation.** Note, however, that God sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord (Matt. 3:3), preach repentance (Matt. 3:1-2, 8, 11), and baptize all penitents with water (Matt. 3:6, 11; Mark 1:5,6; John 1:26, 33) for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4).

The proponents of the thief on the cross argument also fail to realize that the Church was not established until fifty days after the thief died because the Church was established on Pentecost (Pente means 50) as recorded in Acts chapter 2.

Furthermore, assume for instance that the thief on the cross was not baptized for the remission of sins (we must assume so since the text is silent). Does this mean that Christ was powerless to provide the thief a special dispensation while He was still on the Earth? And, if not, does this necessarily mean that the same rule applies to us? Of course not. **Christ never preached the futility of baptism nor instructed anyone to preach against its necessity, but rather His last words on Earth contained a command to His disciples to “make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe ALL things that I have commanded you (Matt. 28:19-20), and He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16).** How significant are Christ’s last words?

Otis Asa Burgess, a Restoration preacher of the 19th century framed his response to the argument of the thief on the cross this way (*it would also apply to you sick man argument*):

To make now a brief note of the negative of this whole subject, there will be found but one argument that ever has assumed even the show of plausibility; this is in the question, "What shall I do?" as addressed by a certain young man to the Savior. Various modifications of the same objection are found, as in the thief on the cross. These, however, will all receive the same answer. If, indeed, the answer which the young man received be taken as the standard, it would be quite as well to desist from all efforts to save men; for a part of that answer was, "Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor." Such a method of salvation failed even in that case, though it was received from the Savior's own lips. There must be something wrong, either in the answer or in its application; the former can not be true, for the Savior could not fall to suit the occasion; **the mistake, therefore, must consist in attempting to make a general application of a special case, for nowhere afterward did Christ command that method of salvation to be preached.** The same is true of the thief on the cross, and all similar cases of special salvation. **The answer to the whole**

**objection is, that while Christ was on earth, he used his power to forgive sin, as his power to raise the dead, just as it seemed good in his own eyes; but, being about to depart from earth, never more in person to minister to the wants of men, he gave to his apostles a short and simple law, which should be equally applicable to the beggar and the prince, and in the acceptance of which all might be saved. This law he commanded them to preach in all the world, and this law contained the three terms, Faith, Repentance, and Immersion.** If, therefore, any man or woman will inquire "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" let them consider for themselves how far their desire for salvation has already led them; if so far that they believe in Christ, let them repent; if so far that they have repented, let them be immersed; and let this be done according to Scripture example, immediately, that they may know they are pardoned, and be filled with joy and gladness. Moreover, let the servants of Christ, to whom such a momentous question may be addressed, consider well the occasion and surroundings, and, if like the jailer, there be an ignorance of Christ, let faith first be preached, but immerse, if need be, the same hour of the night; if like the three thousand, they already believe, preach repentance, and immerse the same day; but if like Paul, there be but one thing lacking, preach that one thing, and if the inquirer be as honest as Paul, he will be immersed straightway.

Otis Asa Burgess, What Must I do to be Saved?  
The Living Pulpit of the Christian Church 180-182 (1868) (emphasis added).

["Was there any salvation before the baptism of John?"](#)

There was no salvation before the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 5:6-21; 1 Cor. 15:1-17). If He had not come, John the Baptist would have been a good preacher of God, but otherwise irrelevant. If Jesus had not come, died, and arose, no one would have been saved from the beginning with Adam to you and me today (Rom. 5:6-21; 1 Cor. 15:1-17). John the Baptist did not save, nor is baptism in the name of John the Baptist of any value today, but only baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), though it must be coupled with faith (Mark 16:16) and repentance (Acts 2:38). Even then, however, continued obedience is still required, and failing that, continued repentance and prayer (Matt. 7:21; 1 Cor. 9:27, 10:12; Acts 8:5-24).

Your question regarding the baptism of John reminds me of two additional points. First, John's baptism was of no effect after Christ arose (Acts 19:1-5), and baptism for any reason other than the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) is also a nullity.

Some people have questioned whether people who, living during the time of Christ, who were baptized into John's baptism before Christ's death had to be "re-baptized" after Christ's resurrection (Cf. Acts 19:1-5). I honestly do not know, nor am I overly concerned with the answer because it only relates to those who were alive at that time. The answer to the question is of no relevance to me today since John's baptism is no longer authorized, nor commanded, and no one alive today was baptized into John's baptism before Christ died. To be effective, baptism requires four (4) things:

1. A proper subject (*e.g.*, someone who has heard and believes the Gospel, who is willing to confess Christ, and is also willing to repent of his sins);
2. The proper authority (*i.e.*, "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," Matt. 28:19);
3. The proper means (*i.e.*, immersion into water); and
4. The proper purpose or reason (*i.e.*, the remission of sins, Acts 2:38).

With respect to the disciples in Acts 19:1-5, I believe they were baptized again because they were baptized into John's baptism instead of Christ's after Christ died. Of course, this is admittedly speculation on my part since I do not know when they were first baptized because the text is silent as to this point. However, the disciples did say that they had not heard of a Holy Spirit. (I INFER from this that they certainly knew of Christ because John and his disciples preached Christ. They may have been baptized, however, by a disciple of John who had not yet heard of the resurrection of Christ.) Despite my reluctance to state definitively whether someone baptized into John's baptism before Christ's death had to be baptized again, we can state one thing for certain: **One can be religious and undergo a baptismal experience, and still not be a true disciple of Jesus Christ!** Have you been baptized and if so, for what reason at the time?

"What is in the water that forgives sin anyway?  
Nothing..."

You are correct in your belief that water does not save. Baptism in water, however, coupled with faith (Mark 16:16) and repentance (Acts 2:38) does. Baptism is a sign of faith, a necessary one since it, like confession (Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33; Luke 12:8; 2 Tim. 2:12), is required. Baptism is faith in action. As James said, "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). Thus, baptism is a demonstration of faith, a proof to others that you believe, and "the answer of a good conscience towards God" (1 Peter. 3:21).

The simplest answer to your question is that the contents of the water (other than the convert and the one conducting the baptism) does not matter; we must be baptized because God commands it (Mark 16:16). Your question reminds me of the story of

Naaman (2 Kings 5) who questioned the necessity of dipping seven times in the muddy Jordan River (v. 12). Logic and reason told Naaman that the rivers in Syria were much cleaner than the Jordan (v. 12). However, he wasn't cleansed of his leprosy until he dipped seven times in the Jordan (v. 14). **Similarly, you will not be cleansed of your sins until you are immersed for that reason!**

Baptism in water is important because without immersion into water, we do not come into contact with the blood of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Do you take the Lord's Supper? If so, why? Because it is commanded (1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7; Matt. 26:26-29), and because it symbolizes the fact that Christ is our passover (1 Cor. 5:7), and like the passover lamb of the Old Testament, we are to "eat" or share in the body of the lamb that was slain for us (Matt. 26:26-29). Now obviously when we eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine, they are not the real body and blood of Christ; there is no Catholic transubstantiation. We do remember the memorial each week, however, because it is commanded, because it is a memorial, because of its symbolic significance, and because it is a public sign of faith. Similarly, baptism is commanded (Mark 16:16). Baptism symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). Baptism is a public act or work of faith that SAVES US (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is how we "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27), and how our sins are first forgiven (Acts 2:38; Cf. 1 Cor. 6:11) because it is how we come into contact, symbolically, with the blood of Christ by sharing in His death (Rom. 6:3-4; Cf. Rev. 1:5).

The importance of the blood of Christ to the scheme of redemption should not be overlooked. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:2). The blood of Christ reconciles us (bring us back), both Jew and Gentile together, to God (Eph. 2:13-16). Sin makes us enemies of God (Rom. 5:10; James 4:4) and the blood of Christ reconciles us (Rom. 5:9), and brings peace between us and God (Col. 1:20). Sin enslaves us (Rom. 6:17) and the blood of Christ redeems us, or buys us back to God (1 Pet. 1:18-19). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:10), but the blood of Christ cleanses us (Rev. 7:13-14). Whoever sins is guilty of violating God's laws (1 John 3:4), but the blood of Christ justifies (or acquits) us (Rom. 5:9; see also James 2:24). Sin brings eternal death (Rom. 6:23) and the blood of Christ provides us with a propitiation or covering (Rom. 3:25), He literally died for us (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 4:10)! "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sins (Heb. 9:22).

Today, we can only encounter the blood of Christ in the way He commanded—baptism (Mark 16:16). For only as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). In baptism we share in the likeness of Christ's crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-7; Gal. 2:20). In baptism we are freed (NKJV), acquitted (notes to the NASV), or justified (Darby) of our sins (Rom. 6:7) which are then "washed away" (Acts 22:16) since we have received the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

[At least Catholics believe their water is holy.](#)

In this regard, the Catholics go too far. The Catholics actually believe that works alone (like baptism), without faith, can save. Obviously, this is wrong. The Catholic

belief that actions or works without faith can save is what led Martin Luther to pen his 96 theses of protestation. Of course, Martin Luther swung the pendulum too far in the opposite direction by espousing that faith alone, without works will save. In this regard, Martin Luther became a false teacher. Consider what Luther wrote:

"In direct opposition to St. Paul and all the rest of the Bible, it [the Book of James] ascribes justification to works, and declares that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up his son. St. Paul, on the contrary, in Romans 4, teaches that Abraham was justified without works, by his faith alone, the proof being Genesis 15, which was before he sacrificed his son.

Although it would be possible to 'save' this epistle by glossing it with a correct explanation of justification, here ascribed to works, it is impossible to deny that it does interpret Moses' word in Genesis 15, which speaks not of Abraham's works but of his faith, just as Paul makes clear in Romans 4, as Abraham's works. **This defect proves that the epistle [of James] is not of apostolic provenance...**

He [James] does violence to Scripture, and so contradicts Paul and all Scripture. He tries to accomplish by emphasizing law what the apostles bring about by attracting men to love. **I therefore refuse him [James] a place among the writers of the true canon of my Bible."**

(From Luther's Preface to Epistle of James) (Emphasis added).

"If nonsense is spoken anywhere, this [the book of James] is the very place."

(From Luther's *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*)

"We should throw the epistle of James out of the University of Wittenberg, for it doesn't amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except in the salutation. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place a great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, 'Wait a moment! I'll oppose them and urge works alone.' This James did. He wrote not a word about the suffering and resurrection of Christ, although this is what all the apostles preached about... The ancients recognized this, too, and therefore they

didn't acknowledge the Epistle of James as one of the authentic epistles."

(From TableTalk #5443, in *Luther's Works* 54:424)

I find Luther's statements nothing short of heretical. I believe that he will have to answer for these words on the Last Day. Luther, however, got two things right: First, works alone cannot save; and Secondly, the Bible cannot prove salvation by faith alone with the Book of James included in the canon. Luther recognized the latter truth; that is why he believed that the Book of James was written by an unbelieving Jew.

By the way, I believe Luther was wrong when he wrote that the "ancients . . . didn't acknowledge the Epistle of James as one of the authentic epistles." In a letter written by Clement of Rome around 95 AD (about the same time Revelation was written by John) there is evidence that Clement may have been quoting James. [Shane Scott, "The Problem of Canon," *A Place to Stand: Apologetics in an Uncertain Age* 131, 141 (Florida College Annual Lectures 1999)].

Please note that ALL advocates of "faith only" have inherited their beliefs straight from Luther. You have. Please also note that you cannot believe that the Book of James is an inspired book, inspired from God, if you believe in faith only salvation. If you do believe in faith only salvation, and that the Book of James is divinely inspired, then you either believe in a Bible that irreconcilably contradicts itself, or you believe the Bible means something other than what it says. If the Bible irreconcilably contradicts itself, then we have no way of learning the truth because we could never trust any passage to be truthful. How could you choose between faith only and baptism only? You couldn't. Any decision you made would be arbitrary and you would have a 50% chance of being wrong. If the Bible means something other than what it says, then who is Martin Luther (and all of his "spiritual descendents") to say definitively what it says? The opinion of a Moonie would be just as persuasive.

In sum, the water is not Holy, but water baptism is commanded. It is the only way to put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), or to symbolically come into contact with the blood of Christ, to share in His death (Rom. 6:3), burial (Rom. 6:4), and resurrection (Rom. 6:4), and if we refuse to be baptized, we have failed to completely obey Christ in ALL things.

Reason, logic, and Scripture revolt against all these things... Often Scriptures that refer to the word of God are distorted to mean water baptism. Have you not read of the washing of the water of the word? The word of God is often referred to as water...

Are you referring to Ephesians 5:26, "that He might sanctify and cleanse it [the church, v. 25] with the washing [*loutron*, Greek, lit. Bathing, bath, the act of bathing, Strong's 3067] of water by the word?" If so, I believe you may be confusing

the metaphorical with the literal.

Jesus said “believe and be baptized.” By that, I suggest He meant what He said; that is BE BATPIZED. In the other context (Eph. 5:26), I believe that the inspired writer is using metaphors to illustrate the necessity of baptism. For example, how is the church in Ephesians 5:26 cleansed? By “washing in the water of the word.” Why does Paul use this language? Because the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament was replete with commands, and the Jewish traditions replete with customs, regarding cleanliness, ceremonial cleanliness under the old law, and physical cleanliness in the old customs (Luke 11:38). This, however, does not dilute the commands to be baptized. Rather, this allusion buttress the commands by reinforcing the necessity of baptism! How is the church cleansed? Through the “washing of water by the word.” Is the word physical water? No (though it is spiritual water for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness John 4:10, 7:37-38; Matt. 5:6). How then do we cleanse ourselves with the “water by the word?” By obeying ALL Scripture including those requiring baptism.

What is water baptism? It is exactly what Peter said it was in I Peter 3:21. It does not put away the filth of the flesh, but it is the answer of a good conscience toward God. Christians should be water baptised as an outward act to demonstrate before God, the world, and other Christians that they have crucified the old sinful man and have made Jesus lord of their life.

You and I are in complete agreement on this point, but these points do not argue against the necessity of the remission of sins, or that baptism provides a remission of sins (Acts 2:38). By the way, 1 Cor. 6: 9-11 and Romans 5:9-10, 6:3-6 also support our beliefs on these points.

It is unfortunate that you do not believe in a Biblical baptism in the Holy Spirit as well. Jesus thought the baptism of the Holy Spirit was so important and critical to empower his believers that he told them not to go out into the world until they received the Holy Spirit (being evidence by speaking in tongues).

You do not question that Christian were baptised in water though all the Christians and all the specific occurances are not mentioned in the bible. Why do you then question the baptism in Holy Spirit? The New Testament church is one church that should be thinking, believing, confessing, and acting like the beginning New Testament church. How grieved God

must be to see so many people reject the person of the Holy Spirit...

Please do not take this lightly. How can you believe you are in right-standing with God when you reject his Holy Spirit?

I will now answer the questions and arguments found in the three paragraphs above.

I believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It did occur twice in the New Testament (Acts 2, Acts 10). However, I do not believe it exists today for the following two primary reasons (though there is a host of secondary reasons):

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is no longer authorized; we are commanded to neither administer nor receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
2. The text of the New Testament leads me to believe that the two recorded instances of Holy Spirit baptism were the only two occasions on which Holy Spirit baptism occurred. The baptism of the Holy Spirit existed for a specific purpose – to establish the authority of God through the demonstration of the working of miraculous, spiritual gifts.

**The baptism of the Holy Spirit is no longer authorized; we are commanded to neither administer, nor receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.** John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:33). No where else in Scripture is authority found for the proposition that anyone else can (or did) administer this form of baptism. Although the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his relatives and close friends (apparently all Gentiles), It did so without any assistance from Peter; thus, Peter did not administer it on that occasion.

**There is no Scriptural authority for the proposition that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was for everyone.** John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:33), but John the Baptist did not say who Jesus would baptize in this manner. Jesus told the Apostles that He would baptize the Apostles with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), and did not say that anyone else would receive it. You can readily determine from the text in Acts 1:5 that the “you” in verse five (5) is referring to the Apostles as identified in verse two (2). There is no denying, however, that Cornelius and his relatives and close friends (again, all Gentile), but as we shall see below, it was not for salvation or the remission of sins, but for a unique purpose that doesn’t exist today.

**The purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was to establish the authority of God, not the remission of sins.** Look at what occurred on the two occasions where the baptism of the Holy Spirit was recorded. In Acts chapter two, when the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, there was:

1. A sound from Heaven that could be HEARD be all present in the house where the Apostles were (Acts 2:2);
2. Divided tongues, “as of fire” VISIBLY APPEARED and sat upon each Apostle (v. 3); and
3. Each Apostle miraculously began to SPEAK in other languages (v. 4) which was HEARD AND WITNESSED (v. 6) by a multitude of people in Jerusalem (v. 5) for the Passover from every nation under heaven (v. 5).

What affect did this have on those who heard and witnessed these things?

1. They listen to Peter preach the Gospel (vv. 14-37);
2. They were “cut to the heart” (v. 37);
3. They desired to know from Peter what God wanted them to do (v. 37);
4. Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (v. 38) and he exhorted them to “be saved from this perverse generation”; (v. 40) thus, they were not already saved though they apparently already believed (v. 37); and
5. “Then those who gladly received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them [the disciples]” (v. 41).

It appears to me that the baptism of the Holy Spirit convinced the multitude that Peter and the other Apostles were men from God, speaking on His authority. In addition, it appears from the passage that those who were baptized were “saved from this perverse generation,” and “added” by God to the number of disciples.

Similarly, in Acts chapter 10 the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his close relatives and friends as it had on the Apostles in the beginning (Acts 11:15). Cornelius and his close relatives and friends began to speak other tongues (or languages) which was witnessed by Peter and other Jews (Acts 10:45-46). The effect this had on Peter, the other Jews with him, and the other Jews in Jerusalem was to confirm for them that the Gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Acts 11:18). Note that up to this point in Acts, no Gentile had yet converted to Christ, everyone else either was born a Jew or had converted to Judaism as a proselyte. (The Ethiopian Eunuch Acts 8 was apparently in Jerusalem to worship in the Jewish tradition (v. 27), and later converted to Christ (v. 38)). **Have you personally observed a baptism of the Holy Spirit accompanied by miraculous, truly miraculous, sights, sounds and the ability to speak foreign languages by people who before the baptism could not speak those very languages?** Can you site other Biblical examples of baptism that the Bible refers to as of the Holy Spirit?

Note also that even though Cornelius was a “devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always . . . prayers and alms [that were considered] a memorial before God,” (Acts 10:1-3) he was still baptized (v. 48). Even though Cornelius was so good that God sent an angel, and later the Apostle Peter himself to Cornelius, he was still baptized. Moreover,

even though he believed and was filled with the Holy Spirit –the very essence of God – Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptized with water (v. 48). Thus, even when the baptism of the Holy Spirit is present, water baptism is still required and we do not need to guess or wonder why it is necessary since Christ and Peter both said it was necessary for salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21); Jesus said it was necessary to see the kingdom of heaven (John 3:1-5); and Peter said it is necessary for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). **Can you assist me in finding equally explicit language that instructs us as to the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit if it was not only to establish the authority of God?**

Now this is not to say that we do not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we are baptized (Acts 2:38), but we do not receive the miraculous gifts.

Finally, we are no longer baptized with the Holy Spirit baptism because there is only one baptism today as Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:5 when he was still preaching water baptism, and indeed, most likely still baptizing people. Most commentators agree that Paul wrote Ephesians around 60-61 AD while imprisoned in Rome, approximately the same time he wrote Colossians where in 3:12 he states that we are “buried with Him [Jesus] in baptism.” How is the baptism of the Holy Spirit analogous to a burial? Aside from Acts 2 and Acts 10, the only baptisms recorded in the Bible where the means of baptism (*i.e.*, water or Holy Spirit) are either identified or reasonably inferred are water baptisms. The Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized in water (Acts 8:36) and Cornelius was baptized in water (Acts 10:47) even though he had already been filled with the Holy Spirit. Although the other examples of conversion do not explicitly mention water, I believe that no other inference of the means of baptism is reasonable considering the fact that John the Baptist prepared the way with water baptism, Christ was baptized in water, baptism is to symbolize a burial with Christ, there is only one baptism today, and the only baptisms recorded in the Bible which are not associated with miracles all involved water. Any other inference is not only unreasonable and implausible, but also irresponsible considering the importance of God’s word and the gravity of the consequences if you are wrong.

The baptism referenced in Mark 16:16 must be water baptism for two reasons: (1) It is the only baptism recorded in the Bible that was administered by the Apostles following Jesus’ command; and (2) The Bible says there is only “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5).

### **Concluding remarks.**

Brian,

Thanks again for writing. I appreciate your willingness to study and discuss spiritual matters. I hope I have not offended you with any of my comments. I do hope that you will examine what I have said as well as the Scriptures I have cited. Again, focus your attention on the Scriptures themselves and not the hypothetical arguments and logical paradigms of self-important men. “Remember God has made foolish the

wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 1:20). Therefore, we can not rely on men and their wisdom, but must seek the truth in the Bible. Also, do not be like Naaman and judge what you read by what you already believe. Remember, “the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23).

Thanks again for a third time. I sincerely hope that a study of God’s word will convince you that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins and salvation.

Sincerely,

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