

Confession vs. Baptism

by Johnny Cox

Salvation is certainly the most important doctrine in the Bible. Unfortunately, there are many confusing messages on what should be the most fundamental of all God's teachings. This makes it difficult to work with others and really challenges our motto of, "We are not the only Christians, but Christians only." Growing up in the denominational world, I understand why they separate confession from baptism. With the goal of unity, I am sharing my approach in how to speak with denominational friends, and a rebuke to us who may hold the correct view, but don't share the truth in love.

A mistake that is made repeatedly by some is that of jumping right into interpretation, instead of simply showing what the New Testament church did. The discussion shifts from defining terms, historical precedent, and Greek, to just doing what the Bible says. It is so much easier.

Before we begin, we must first understand how our friends think. Denominations separate baptism from salvation, because in their view, including baptism would imply salvation is by works. So instead of including baptism, it is relegated to a secondary or optional status. With this either/or understanding it is hard for them to understand that you can have both and it does not negate the work of Christ on the cross. Confession and baptism are seen as opposing forces, one saving and the other testifying. The early church though, saw them as working together to bring about salvation.

Some love to quote Romans 10:9-10: "*that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation*" (NAS95).

Yet strangely, the Roman Road (a denominational method to present the gospel) bypasses Romans 6 on its way to Romans 10.

"*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection,*" (Romans 6:3-5 NAS95).

For many today, though we find it hard to believe, these verses are understood as having absolutely nothing to do with each other. They are even seen as contradictory, as the Romans 6 passage is taught to them as what happens after salvation. They were taught the interpretation first, and then it was applied to the Scriptures so the obvious parallels are missed. This is why proof texting is so unsuccessful and ultimately breaks down. When we quote verses our friends just hear "our interpretation" and don't hear what the verses are saying.

So we must first take what seems like two separate concepts and explain that baptism and confession are complementary and the church in the Bible did both at the same time! When we put

it like this, it will finally get our friend's attention. Now when we look at Bible verses it will be to show what was done, NOT what it means. Our friends have never done this before.

So what did they do? Before you can get into that, you may have to give your friend a lesson in rhetoric.

From AmericanRhetoric.Com: "Synecdoche (sih-NECK-duh-kee): Figure of comparison in which a word standing for part of something is used for the whole of that thing or vice versa; any part or portion or quality of a thing used to stand for the whole of the thing or vice versa."

With so many verses teaching about salvation, yet covering different aspects, we can safely conclude the Bible is using synecdoche. If it were not, we would have real and contradictory teachings on how to become a Christian. For example:

"... *baptism now saves you* ..." (1 Peter 3:21 NAS95).

"*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13 NAS95).

Sometimes two things are listed: "*Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38 NAS95).

"*He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned*" (Mark 16:16 NAS95).

By understanding synecdoche, everything will start to make sense. The Bible is obviously using parts to represent the whole in matters relating to salvation. This is consistent throughout the New Testament, as many elements are said to "save."

To clarify how confession and baptism were used together, we need them demonstrated together by the early church. Conveniently, the Bible gives us two examples of how this was done.

"*As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' [And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him*" (Acts 8:36-38 NAS95).

"*Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name*" (Acts 22:16 NAS95).

This sheds light on Romans 10:9-10 as confession must have been done at the same time. The context of Romans 10 supports this assertion as one reads further: "*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13 NAS95).

The New Testament church used terms interchangeably, knowing they stood for the totality of conversion, as they were all done at the same time. If one has faith, naturally that person will confess, repent, be baptized, and live the Christian life, if taught to do so.

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Confession vs. Baptism (cont.)

There wasn't a "sinner's prayer" in the NT, but converts were made to understand they were sinners. To be baptized with Christ is to die with Christ, killing the old man as Romans 6 teaches, crucifying it with its sinful nature. If only the pro-baptism side would emphasize this aspect more. Many baptism proponents argue so much for the practice that it sounds like baptism is the gospel and not the response to the gospel as it really is (1 Corinthians 1:17). Likewise, we have many baptized people in our churches today who think they are going to heaven because they did a ritual of the organized church. These ministers who have preached baptism in this fashion are just as guilty as the one who teaches a simple prayer will suffice.

We are all ultimately saved by God's grace, made possible by the blood of Jesus. When we hear the gospel and believe, the Bible teaches us to repent of our sins, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized. This is the biblical pattern that we should follow, baptism just being the time and the place that we accept what we have believed on in faith. Baptism doesn't negate the cross, rather it tells when and where we receive the blessings of the cross (Acts 2:38).

Yes, we could dream up possible exceptions "What if I was in the desert and there was no water to baptize?" or "What if a deaf mute was on a plane about to crash and could not confess!" Because we are saved by grace, God will deal fairly with people in exceptional circumstances, but as evangelists we have been called to preach what was laid down by the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). It is not our right to allow exceptional circumstances to change the normal everyday practice of the New Testament church.

Almost everyone we will ever meet will be able to hear the gospel, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized, if they truly want to be saved. When we start to reason that a prayer will suffice, or sprinkling instead of immersion, or any of the other countless variations to the gospel we have added over the last 2000 years, it is no wonder so many people are asking, "How do I know I am really saved?" With each denomination giving its opinion and not what was demonstrated by the New Testament Church, no wonder people are confused.

I close with this final verse given from the Apostle Paul to a young preacher looking for advice in building his church:

"Retain the standard . . ." (2 Timothy 1:13 NAS95). (RH)

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Lessons from the Past (cont.)

Motivated by abolitionist sentiments, the fact that Barclay owned slaves contributed to their unwillingness to support the ACMS. Because the organizational meeting occurred in Indianapolis it first took the name "Northwestern Christian Missionary Society" but later removed the name's geographical designation. The CMS supported the work of Pardee Butler, a colorful missionary to the Kansas Territory.

The Foreign Christian Missionary Society (FCMS) also began over dissatisfaction with the American Christian Missionary Society. It organized in 1875 with Isaac Errett as president.

The Christian Women's Board of Missions (CWBM) began in Cincinnati in October 1874. Movement leaders supported the women in their work and the society reported missionary work in Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, India, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, and Africa.

In 1919 all existing missionary organizations united under the banner of the United Christian Missionary Society (UCMS) with headquarters in Indianapolis.

For a time, the annual meeting of the ACMS served as a general convention for the brotherhood. Protests attacking the financial scheme continued for many years. It seemed to too many that the society "sold membership." Poorer congregations obviously had less voice than more wealthy churches and it seemed that a few powerful individuals governed the society.

Four years after the end of the Civil War, a committee of 20 met in Louisville, Kentucky to come up with a more equitable way to finance missionary work. The "Louisville Plan" came from these meetings. The Louisville Plan called for congregations to send delegates to district, state, and national conventions. States sent two delegates, plus an additional delegate for every 5,000 members in the state, to the annual convention. At the district convention, each congregation presented reports of their activities and growth or decline for the previous year, as well as offerings. The district convention kept half the money for its use and sent the rest to the state convention. The state convention retained half and set the rest to the national convention – the General Convention.

In time all of these organizations became the International Convention of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ). I will have more to say about some of these organizations later. (RH)

(To Be Continued)



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