

Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement

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When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:37-41).

Is our baptism valid if we do not specifically understand at the time of our baptism that it is specifically “for the forgiveness of your sins”? If we misinterprets the precise moment that our sins are remitted, assuming that this interpretation is correct, does this mistake of the intellect invalidate baptism? Is baptism not legitimate if we do not believe that it is exclusively “for the forgiveness of our sins”? Or is baptism authentic because we believe that Jesus is the Messiah? What makes baptism *true* or *false*? How do we determine what is or is not scriptural baptism? These are questions the reformers had to face. These are also questions that Christians must face today. Is it ever correct to rebaptize someone? Is the demand for rebaptism on par with the command by Paul for rebaptism among the Ephesians? If not, why not?

Our beliefs concerning this issue of rebaptism will determine our reaction or our relationship to others who do not understand at the time of their baptism that “for the forgiveness of your sins” is associated, in some sense, with baptism. The crucial question is: Is one a Christian if he or she is not baptized with the exact understanding that baptism is “for the

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forgiveness of your sins”? If we are baptized to *obey God*, is our baptism solid? Is baptism for just “one item” and nothing else? If baptism is not performed purposely “for the forgiveness of your sins,” should we be rebaptized? Alexander Campbell met this controversy with strong opposition.² Not only did Campbell reject rebaptism, but David Lipscomb also responded with negative reaction against those who advocated rebaptism exclusively “for the forgiveness of your sins.”³

ACTS 2:38 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In the initial stage of the Stone/Campbell Reformation Movement, “forgiveness of sins” was not associated with baptism.⁴ In order to understand the implications of Acts 2:38, the reformers had to wrestle with the details of this Scripture. What does a literary reading of this verse set forth? In other words, what are the *commands* and what are the *promises* in Acts 2:38? Does this passage contain two or four commands? Or are there two commands and two

² See Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Indiana: Religious Book Service, 1897), 2: 444, where he jots down:

Mr. Campbell had, however, always been entirely opposed to the practice of reimmersion upon such trivial grounds as were alleged in favor of it, believing it to be in all cases valid where there was a sincere belief in Christ, however uninformed the baptized person might be at the time with regard to the nature or design of the institution. Nothing, he justly thought, could ever justify reimmersion, except a consciousness on the part of the individual that at his first baptism he was destitute of faith in Christ.

See also, Alexander Campbell, “Rebaptism,” *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 2 (November 7, 1831): 483, where he voices his views against a second baptism for a particular purpose:

To be baptized a second time for the remission of sins by itself, or for the Holy Spirit by itself, or for any one blessing, is without command, precedent, or reason from the New Testament. . . . But were not many of John’s disciples baptized again? Not one of them was baptized twice into John’s baptism; but some of them were once baptized into Jesus Christ. John baptized not into the name of the Lord Jesus, but into reformation, saying that “his disciples should believe in him that was to come after him.” There is neither precedent nor analogy to support this practice.

³ See David Lipscomb, “Rebaptism Reviewed” *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 272-23. Cited in Jimmy Allen, *Re-baptism: What One Must Know To Be Born Again?* (Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1991), 99—108. See also Lipscomb and Sewell, *Questions and Answers* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974), 49.

⁴ See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 207. Again, Richardson captures the absence of a consciousness of remission of sins associated with baptism when he pens:

No special promises were recognized as connected with it, and it was very unusual to hear this subject presented at all, except when some one was about to be baptized. Mr. Scott, Elder Bentley and some others of the prominent preachers, were indeed aware that Mr. Campbell had spoken of it at the McCalla debate as a pledge of pardon, but in this point of view it was, as yet, contemplated only *theoretically*, none of them having so understood it when they were themselves baptized, and being yet unable properly and practically to realize or appreciate its importance in this respect.

blessings in this verse? Are “remission of sins”⁵ and the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (KJV) blessings or commands? Are repentance and baptism commands or blessings? These are problems that challenged the early reformers. One of the many objectives of this essay is to search the primary sources of the early reformers to determine their reaction to rebaptism—for and against the practice.

Baptism and Forgiveness of Sins

The perception of rebaptism “for the forgiveness of your sins” is not something new for believers today. This practice of rebaptism entered the Stone/Campbell Movement early in its origin.⁶ One of the most hotly debated and possibly the most misunderstood Scriptures in the New Testament is Acts 2:38. This passage is still utilized by many well-meaning believers to demand rebaptism and to separate themselves from other believers who were not baptized with the view to remission of sins, that is to say, remission *after* baptism, not *before* baptism.⁷ Acts 2:38 is employed by some members of the Churches of Christ to substantiate their belief that they and they alone belong to Christ. In other words, anyone who was not immersed with the understanding that baptism is specifically “for the remission of your sins” is not a part of God’s community.

Thus, according to many Christians, a proper understanding of this blessing is the criterion by which we determine if we are or are not children of God. To state more clearly, salvation is based upon an intellectual assent to this dogma of “for the forgiveness of your sins.” This philosophy is saying that salvation hinges upon one’s belief of two objects: (1) belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and (2) belief in baptism “for the forgiveness of your sins.” Belief in number one is not sufficient for salvation without a belief in number two, so many advocate.

As a result of this conviction, many believers have concluded that those who practice immersion, but not precisely “for the forgiveness of your sins” have not been added to the Christian *ekklesia*. If we are baptized to *obey* God, this motive of obedience alone, according to some, is not sufficient to validate baptism if we do not know the precise moment God remits sins.⁸ If we are only baptized “in [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

⁵ *New King James Version*.

⁶ See Alexander Campbell, “Re-immersion and Brother Thomas,” *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 2 (February 1836): 56-64.

⁷ See Dan Winkler, “The Present Day Discussion About: Baptism,” in Jim Law’s, Lectureship Director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993), 385—399. See also William Woodson, “Preface,” in William Woodson, ed., *Change Agent and Churches of Christ* (TN: Sain Publications, 1994), 5, where he bemoans the practice of not making an understanding of “for the remission of sins” mandatory for baptism. He says, “That baptism for the remission of sins is mandatory to be understood and present in one’s becoming a Christian.” Again, see Ted Knight, “False Teaching on Baptism,” in *Heaven’s Imperatives Or Man’s Innovations: Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?* Curtis Cates, ed., 1995 Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship (TN: Sain Publications, 1995), 353—361.

⁸ See Lipscomb, “Rebaptism Reviewed,” 49, for an overview of this mindset—obey alone is not sufficient for valid baptism. Lipscomb refutes the notion that one must understand that baptism is for the

Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), then, according to many Christians, this immersion into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not sufficient for *right* baptism. If we do not understand at the time of our baptism that it is “for the forgiveness of your sins,” then our baptism is null and void. It is feared that if we accept other believers without a proper understanding of Acts 2:38, this will open the flood gate to the acceptance of other believers as Christians. Consequently, as a result of this mindset, many reason that Baptists are not Christians.

It is not uncommon for some members within the Churches of Christ to refuse to recognize believers in *other* denominations.⁹ But this denial of acceptance was not the reaction of many of the forefathers within the Reformation Movement of the Churches of Christ. In fact, a large number held to the view that there were Christians within other denominations. Many of the early reformers accepted the Baptists as disciples of Christ.¹⁰ For this reason, they objected to *reimmersion* of those who wanted to identify with the Reformation Movement initiated by the Campbells to bring about renovation within the Christian Church.

remission of sins in order for it to be acceptable to God. This article is quoted in this paper—see under caption: David Lipscomb and Rebaptism.

⁹ Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement, he wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a denomination, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, “The Editor’s Response to Mr. Broaddus,” *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556 (emphasis mine—Robert Dallas Burdette).

¹⁰ See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 675, where he relates a conversation that he had with Alexander Campbell during his final earthly sojourn. Alexander expressed sorrow at the separation of his reform movement and the Baptist: “There was never any sufficient reason,” said he, “for a separation between us and the Baptists. We ought to have remained one people, and to have labored together to restore the primitive faith and practice.” See also *Ibid.*, 518—519, the following comments of Alexander:

We have one faith, one Lord, one baptism, but various opinions. These, when left to vegetate without annoyance, if erroneous, wither and die. We find much philosophy in one of Paul’s precepts, somewhat mistranslated: ‘Receive one another without regard to difference of opinion.’ We indeed receive in our communion persons of other denominations who will take upon them the responsibility of their participating with us. We do indeed in our affections and in our practice receive all Christians, all who give evidence of their faith in the Messiah, and of their attachment to his person, character, and will.

EARLY REFORMERS' VIEWS OVER REBAPTISM WITHIN THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Some of the early pioneers—Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), Barton Stone (1772-1844), Walter Scott (1796-1861), David Lipscomb (1831-1917), Elisha G. Sewell (1830-1924), James A. Harding (1848-1922)—maintained that they were bringing about *reform* within the existing church of Christ, not restoration, but reformation.¹¹ According to the early pioneers of the Stone/Campbell Movement, the church did not cease to exist; thus, the freethinkers did not wish to bury living persons by rebaptizing them. They reasoned that it was against the law to bury a breathing human being. If someone had been baptized to obey God, then, that individual was alive in Jesus. According to the reformers, meeting under a denominational name did not prevent one from belonging to God's community of believers. In fact, the denominations spoke of themselves as the churches of Christ.

Few Christians today are aware of how or when the practice of rebaptism “for the forgiveness of your sins” began, or even what position(s) the pioneers of the Stone/Campbell Movement took toward this practice of rebaptism of believers. The general assumption seems to be that baptism “for the forgiveness of your sins” has been insisted upon from the beginning of the Reformation Movement of the Campbells and Stone as one of its hallmarks. However, the historical facts dealing with rebaptism speak otherwise. To illustrate this fact of negative response to rebaptism by the reformers, then, it is necessary to cite original sources to discover their feelings and practice about this peculiar procedure that is promoted by many Christians today. One such example is one of the first reformers, namely, Barton W. Stone.

Barton W. Stone

In 1807, three years after *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, Barton W. Stone sought to defend infant sprinkling, but his unsuccessful attempt resulted in his acceptance of immersion of believers as scriptural baptism. Following this concept of believers' baptism, Stone and his fellow Christian preachers immersed one another. At the time of these baptisms, neither Stone nor his fellow ministers associated “for the forgiveness of your sins” with baptism. But upon the discovery of this truth, Stone extended an invitation to accept Jesus based upon Acts 2:38; yet, this doctrine was not well received, and, as a result of this coolness, he continued to employ the use of the “Mourner's bench” until 1825. Stone commented upon this thumbs down attitude over Acts 2:38 in his graphic description:

The subject of baptism now engaged the attention of the people very generally, and some, with myself, began to conclude that it was ordained for the remission of sins. . . . Into the spirit of the doctrine I was never fully led, until it was revived by Brother Campbell, some years later.¹²

¹¹ For an excellent treatment of the distinction between “reformation” and “restoration,” see Leroy Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement* (Missouri: College Press, 1981), 1—23.

¹² Barton Warren Stone, *Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1874), 61.

Alexander Campbell

Another early harbinger, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), also questioned the “mode” of baptism—immersion or sprinkling, which? Upon the birth of his first child in 1812, he made a thorough investigation on the subject of infant baptism.¹³ And, as a result of his research, he came to the conclusion that baptism is “immersion,” not “sprinkling,” and that baptism is for believers only.¹⁴ Also, Campbell decided that Christian baptism could be performed upon a simple profession of faith, not just upon a “religious experience,” as so many Christians practiced.¹⁵ Following this inquiry, he, his father (Thomas 1763-1864), and five others were immersed (June 1812).¹⁶

In 1812, Campbell recorded his thoughts about the baptisms that took place. It is significant that “remission of sins” was not a part of the baptismal ceremony as is the practice among many Churches of Christ today. Campbell later reflected upon that momentous occasion by recalling his conversation with Matthias Luce (Luce was the one who did the baptizing in June of 1812.).

I was immersed by a Regular Baptist, but not in a Regular Baptist way. I stipulated with Matthias Luce that I should be immersed on the profession of the one fact, or proposition, that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God, when I solicited his attendance with me on that occasion. He replied that it was not usual for the Baptist to immerse simply on that profession; but that he believed it to be scriptural. Fearing, however, to be called to account for it by some of his brethren, he solicited the attendance of Henry Spears, a very worthy brother, for whose undissembled piety I always cherish the highest regard, to accompany him and to hear the half of the censure which might fall upon him for this great aberration from the good old Baptist way. Brother Spears accompanied him, and on this profession alone I was immersed; nor have I ever immersed any person but upon the same profession which I made myself.¹⁷

It is generally taught that Alexander Campbell was immersed exclusively “for the remission of sins.” Mistakenly, some believers still postulate that Campbell was immersed expressly “for the remission of sins” by Matthias Luce, but the historical facts do not corroborate this belief. The truth of the matter is, he was immersed “on the profession of the one fact, or proposition, namely, that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God,” nothing else. Twelve

¹³ See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 1: 391—396.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 395.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 398, where he records the events leading up to Campbell’s baptism:

Alexander had stipulated with Elder Luce that the ceremony should be performed precisely according to the pattern given in the New Testament, and that, as there was no account of any of the first converts being called upon to give what is called a “religious experience,” this modern custom should be omitted, and that **the candidates should be admitted on the simple confession that “Jesus is the Son of God.”**

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 397—398.

¹⁷ Alexander Campbell, “Dialogue on Re-immersion,” *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 7 (July 2, 1832): 319 (emphasis mine—RDB).

years after his baptism (1824), Campbell expresses concisely the same foundation of hope for the believer that he expressed in 1812:

But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church. A Christian, as defined, not by Doctor Johnson, nor any creed-maker, but by one taught of Heaven, and in Heaven, is one that believes this *one fact*, and has submitted to *one institution*, and whose deportment accords with the morality and virtue taught by the great Prophet. The one fact is, that *Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah*.¹⁸

Well-grounded baptism, according to Campbell, hinged upon “The belief of one fact” (Jesus is the Messiah) and “submission to one institution expressive of it” (baptism). Campbell’s stress was **not** upon “remission of sins,”¹⁹ but upon the belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Since Campbell did not understand “for remission of sins” at the time of his baptism, was he still a Christian or a child of Satan? Was Campbell a member of God’s community (church) on earth? If he was a Christian, then, we must accept Campbell’s baptism as valid, based upon his belief that “Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah.” If we accept Campbell’s baptism, how can we reject the baptisms of other believers as invalid?

Baptism “for the remission of sins” gradually developed in Campbell’s thinking. In the earlier stages of his development of Christian baptism, Campbell’s theology of baptism did not include “remission of sins” with immersion until he developed his arguments against infant baptism with McCalla (1823). It is significant that Campbell did not associate “for the remission of sins” with baptism until this debate. It is also noteworthy that eleven years transpired between Campbell’s baptism and this debate. Even though Campbell introduced this concept in the McCalla debate, it was Walter Scott (1796-1861)—four years after the debate—who pioneered this doctrine of “for the remission of sins” and put this concept into his

¹⁸ Alexander Campbell, “The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union,” *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 177.

¹⁹ See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 288, where he writes:

Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the “power of remitting sins” and “washing away sins in baptism.” “These,” said he, “have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth, and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers.” The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, “Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and forebore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression “for the remission of sins.” “When any doctrine,” said he (Mill. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), “is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes.”

preaching, not Alexander Campbell.²⁰ Campbell later sympathized with those who did not understand its great importance. He composed his feelings by saying:

We can sympathize with those who have this doctrine in their own creeds unregarded, and unheeded in its import and utility; for we exhibited it fully in our debate with Mr. McCalla, 1823, without feeling its great importance, and without beginning to practice upon its tendencies for sometime afterwards.²¹

Neither Barton Stone (1772-1844) nor the Campbells were reimmersed after discovering another blessing inherent in baptism; namely, “remission of sins.” This is not only true of these men, but there were others who responded to the “good news” of God that did not understand “remission of sins” as one of the blessings bestowed through immersion. For example, Robert Richardson (1806-1876) mentions Walter Scott (1796-1861), Elder Bently, and others who did not comprehend “for remission of sins” (KJV) at the time of their immersion. Richardson authored the following comments:

Mr. Scott, Elder Bentley, and some others of the prominent preachers, were indeed aware that Mr. Campbell had spoken of it at the McCalla debate as a pledge of pardon, but in this point of view it was, as yet, contemplated only *theoretically*, none of them having so understood it when they were themselves baptized, and being yet unable properly and practically to realize or apprehend its importance in this respect.²²

Walter Scott first began preaching baptism “for the remission of sins” in 1827.²³ He had astounding success and baptized hundreds “for the remission of sins” as he cited Acts 2:38 in support of his newly found truth. Scott’s teaching is a landmark, not because it was the first time this understanding of baptism had been set forth in the Reformation Movement, but because it marked the turning point in preaching on this subject of baptism. Even though Campbell had previously related “remission of sins” with immersion (1823), nevertheless, Walter Scott deserves the credit for making an explicit and pragmatic application of immersion related to “remission of sins.” Richardson wrote:

It was, however, reserved for Walter Scott, a few years later, to make a direct and practical application of the doctrine, and to secure for it the conspicuous place it has since occupied among the chief points urged in the Reformation.²⁴

Also, Richardson chronicles the first person to be immersed in the Stone/Campbell Reformation Movement “for the remission of sins.” He informs his readers that that man was Mr. William Amend. He then tells his readers that Mr. Amend responded to the preaching of

²⁰ See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:212—216.

²¹ Alexander Campbell, Extra, “Remission of Sins,” *Millennial Harbinger* I, (July 5, 1830): 50.

²² Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:207.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84. When he began preaching this doctrine, he was still associated with the Mahoning Baptist Association.

²⁴ Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 84.

Scott on November 18, 1827; he was the first person to be baptized specifically for this reason. Richardson elaborates on this scene:

The people were filled with bewilderment at this strange truth brought to their ears, and now exemplified before their eyes in the baptism of a penitent for a purpose which now, on the 18th of November, 1827, for the first time since the primitive ages was fully and practically realized.²⁵

With the introduction of “for the remission of sins” as an element of baptism, needless to say, this idea created uneasiness on the part of many who did not understand this blessing at the time of their baptism. This controversy over the design of baptism “for the remission of sins” created doubts in the minds of many believers concerning the validity of their own baptism prior to this discovery. Should they be rebaptized? This question was the “big question” in the minds of so many who wanted to be true to the Word of God. Alexander Campbell responds to the question of rebaptism by saying, “No.” In fact, in 1832, Campbell addresses the following argument to a fictitious opponent who championed the rebaptism position.

Why on all your definitions of the kingdom, supposing, as you do, that he that is not formally and understandingly immersed for the remission of his sins cannot enter into this kingdom of heaven; and it being a fact that before the year 1823, since the fifth century, baptism for the remission of sins was not preached, and not until the year 1827 were many immersed with this apprehension of the subject. The dilemma in which your assumption fairly places you is this—either the promise of God has failed, or such persons as were baptized as you were the first time, are in the kingdom.²⁶

Campbell’s argument is that if “for remission of sins” must be known at the time of immersion in order for baptism to be accurate, then the church of Christ ceased to exist for several hundred years. He surmised that that which makes baptism legitimate is not that we believe it is “for the remission of sins,” but rather that we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He rationalized correctly that “for remission of sins” is **not** a command, but rather an executive act of pardon that takes place in the mind of God. Repentance and baptism demonstrates our response to God’s favor extended to us in the sending of His Son for our atonement.

Campbell also understood Acts 2:38 as containing two commands and two blessings—not four commands. In other words, when we respond to repentance and baptism, God showers us with two gifts: (1) “remission of sins,” and (2) “gift of the Holy Spirit” (KJV). In Acts 2:38, we discover two commands (repentance and baptism) and two blessings (forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit). We cannot do the latter (these are promises), only the former (these are commands). In other words, we react through repentance and baptism; on the other hand, God awards through forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 2: 212-214.

²⁶ Alexander Campbell, “Dialogue on Re-Immersion,” *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (March 5, 1932): 119.

²⁷ For an examination of blessings bestowed upon the recipient of baptism, see Campbell, “Dialogue on Re-Immersion,” Ibid., 118—123, where he writes:

A.—And I have sundry things to say which I deem of much importance on this subject, not yet said. One thing I wish you to reflect upon till next we meet, a proposition of such meaning. It is

Twenty Years after Campbell's Baptism

Approximately twenty years after Campbell's baptism, he still preferred not to add "for the remission of sins" to the formula in baptism. Richardson has an insightful comment on Campbell's procedure in baptism (The following quotation appears above, but this insight concerning Campbell's procedure is worthy of double notice):

Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the "power of remitting sins" and "washing away sins in baptism." "These," said he, "have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers." The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, "Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and forbore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression "for the remission of sins." "When any doctrine," said he (Mil. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), "is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes."²⁸

David Lipscomb

Even with Campbell's arguments, the rebaptism controversy continued to strain the Christian community. Several years later, David Lipscomb (1831-1917) addresses this same issue of rebaptism. Sincerity existed on both sides of the point in question. The preposition "for" created the difficulty. The rebaptism debate centered on the meaning of this preposition in Acts 2:38. Lipscomb's lengthy article on "Rebaptism Reviewed" is extremely helpful in understanding the mind-set on both sides of the matter of contention.²⁹ We cannot demonstrate this point of baptism more clearly than by quoting at length from Lipscomb:

I am glad to have this article from Brother Chism. He presents the points in a clear and tangible form so they can be understood. I believe the question ought to and can be settled with all who desire to follow the will of the Lord and are willing to study and abide by his teachings.

Some object to the name "rebaptism." It is a re-immersion. The twelve at Ephesus were rebaptized. I believe persons ought to be rebaptized sometimes, and I call it "rebaptism." I am glad of

this—*baptism cannot be repeated unless in its full sense*. No person can constitutionally be immersed for remission alone—for the Holy Spirit alone—for coming into the kingdom alone. He must be baptized into Christ, in the whole and full sense of the institution, or not at all. Whether you may think it makes for you or for me, I request you to examine it as an independent proposition.

In concluding let me remind you of the danger of running into extremes and eccentricities. The sanguine are liable to take detached and isolated views of favorite topics. Let us regard the whole truth in all its connexions, and give to each its proper importance. A sound understanding will always be on its guard against one-sided views of cardinal truths. Let us not be bewitched by the glare of novelty, by the brilliancy of new discoveries, nor obstinately and superstitiously attached to old opinions (p. 123).

²⁸ Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:288.

²⁹ See Lipscomb, "Rebaptism Reviewed," *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 792-793.

Brother Chism's article because it places the practice on a ground that does not savor of infidelity. I feel shocked when professed Christians ask where the Bible says we must be baptized to obey God. It shows how little they know of the Bible or how ready they are to sacrifice the fundamental principles of the Bible to sustain a pet theory or a party.

Brother Chism justifies the rebaptism practice on the ground that "for the remission of sins" in the sentence, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" is a part of the command, and this seems to be the chief ground on which he bases the practice. I believe "into" is preferable to "for" but he seems to prefer "for." But if "*eis*" or "for," here is a part of the command, what becomes of the argument that it means "in order to obtain," that Brother Chism and others make on the design of baptism with the sects? If it is a reward for obedience to the command, it cannot be a part of the command. That argument on this position is all wrong. It cannot be at once a part of the command and a reward for obedience to the command. Webster defines "for": "The antecedent cause or occasion of an action." It cannot be the promise as a result of the obedience and the obedience itself. I believe it should be "into," indicating a result flowing from the act, so only indirectly a motive leading to it. There is certainly nothing in the sentence that demands it should be a part of the command.

If there is uncertainty about it, let us test in another safe way. Let us interpret it by other similar scriptures. Take Acts 3:19: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." No one would say "that your sins may be blotted out" is a part of the command. It is a result to which obedience to the command leads. It is the same as "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38. "That your sins may be blotted out," or remitted, or forgiven, mean the same. The forgiveness is the act of God, and man cannot obey or do God's part in any work. He can only "repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ"; and leave God to forgive his sins when he has complied with God's requirements.

These suggestions are a full reply to Brother Chism's points. But I examine further. He says the command, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," is the exact equivalent of the commission given by the Lord. This is wrong. It is the application of that general law to one special case, and it is a mistake to interpret and restrict the general law by one special application of it. Numbers of our rebaptist friends ignore the commission altogether and find the law only in the application of it. (Acts 2:38) God first gave the law and then the application of it. Brother Chism reverses God's order, passes by the general law, begins with one special application of it and then restricts the law to this one application. This is as if a lawyer were to find a man tried for stealing a horse. The general law against stealing is applied by the court to this one of horse stealing, and the lawyer afterwards restricts the law against stealing to this one case and insists that the law is not violated unless a horse is stolen. Brother Chism finds the first in their guilt they ask if pardon is possible, and they are told: "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and your sins shall be remitted." To be baptized in the name of Christ is to be baptized as Christ directs—"Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," for in them remission of sins, which they so earnestly sought, would be found. But is that the only blessing that is to be found in these names that can or should move men to seek God?

But Acts 2:38 is the commission applied to that particular case. Mark (16:15, 16) says: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Is "shall be saved" a part of the command in this case? Is it an obligation imposed on man? Does the obligation of man end with being baptized, and is not a promise to man to encourage him, in his weakness and infirmity, to believe and be baptized? Brother Chism will not contradict this. Does not "be saved" correspond exactly to "for [or "into"] the remission of sins?" There is no command in the remission of sins to men, but a promise of what God will do.

The commission by Matthew is: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things

whatsoever I commanded you.” This is applied in Acts 2:38 to the condition of those present. The people were taught, believed, and were commanded to be baptized into the name of Christ, into the remission of sins, and to be baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” because that is the only baptism Christ authorized. When they are baptized into these names, they are baptized into the remission of sins. Into these names, embracing remission of sins in common with all spiritual blessings, are results flowing from the obedience and constitute no part of the obedience. These different promises mean the same and cannot be a part of the obedience.

I think Brother Chism must agree to these points so far, and own “for remission” is a promise to lead to obedience. It is not the only promise. Other promises in Christ may lead as well as this one.

We both agree that remission of sins is a motive to lead to obedience. He seems to think it the only motive, or at least the leading and essential motive to lead to baptism, and without this as the leading and controlling motive the baptism is not acceptable to God. I do not believe this. I believe there is one motive that must be ruling, controlling, ever-present motive in all service to God, without which no service is acceptable to him. That is, we must do the service in the name of Jesus, the Lord. “Whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col. 3:17.) All Jesus did in heaven and on earth was done to please his Father. Nothing can be done in his name that is not controlled by the same desire. The law was: Be baptized “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This is frequently expressed by “in” or “into” the name of the Lord Jesus.” To be in one of these names or person is to be in all. In Christ are many blessings; no human being can know all. God has revealed a few that appeal to our conditions of the persons. Acts 2:38 is not the only application of this commission to the conditions of man.

Take the case of the Samaritans. They had been wicked; the Jews despised them and refused to let them worship with them; but despite their surroundings, they were willing to obey God. The heart of the Almighty is very tender toward those unfortunately situated but willing to obey him. Those who fail to see this are ill fitted to understand and obey God. God sent his servant to the Samaritans. “When they believed Philip preaching good things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” In the name of Jesus remission of sins was enjoyed, but in his name and kingdom are many other precious blessings.

Then there is the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a God-fearing man. He had come several hundred miles to worship God according to his appointments. He was studying God’s word. God was so well pleased with him that he sent his servant to teach him the way of the Lord more perfectly. He preached Jesus to him. He asked and was baptized into Christ. I do not think “for the remission of sins” was made prominent in this conversion, because he was serving God according to the best light he had and was guilty of no great sin.

Then, Cornelius was a Gentile, a good man according to the light he had. He worshipped God. Peter said he feared God and worked righteousness; that commended him to the favor of God, who sent his angel to him. His alms and his prayers were treasured as a memorial before God. Peter told him he was out of Christ, out of God, and he was “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Was much stress laid on “the remission of sins” in this case? He was baptized in the name of Christ, to obey God. Brother Chism, if you had been there, could you have objected to receiving Cornelius unless “for the remission of sins” was present and controlling motive in his baptism? The very same Peter that told the bloody-handed murderers to be baptized “for the remission of your sins” tells Cornelius to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ,” and said nothing of remission of sins. Why the difference?

Then those at Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7). They were serving God according to the best light they had, had been baptized into John’s baptism “for the remission of sins.” They had not learned that John’s baptism had been superseded by baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus,” as prescribed in the commission. When they heard these things, “they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.”

No emphasis was laid on “for remission” in these cases, but great emphasis on “into the name of the Lord Jesus,” as prescribed in the commission. The law was applied to suit the condition of the person. The apostles did not believe that stealing a horse was the only stealing that could be done nor that remission of sins is the only motive to lead men to obey God. Why are not all these applications of the case as much for our instruction as Acts 2:38? Why is not the command to be baptized into Christ, into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, as much the command of God as “for remission of sins”? Why is it not as important that men understand baptism is into Christ as to understand it is for the remission of sins? If we follow the Bible up, we find that in the writings to the churches and to Christians the emphasis is laid on having been baptized into Christ, having put on Christ, and living, dying, and being raised in Christ.

There are now cases corresponding in state to these cases of conversion in Acts. I could mention many. The girl mentioned by Brother Holt that had likely, like Timothy, known the Scriptures from a child, wished to obey Christ, but, not oppressed with the guilt of sin, she had not studied that point. Would the Father reject her because she wanted to follow Christ in her innocency and her youth?

While man is to love and trust God because God is good and blesses those that do his will, the idea that we must know what we are to get for and in each service, and that our service is acceptable only as we understand and render the obedience for the blessings we are to get, is repulsive to God. Abraham was the great model of faith for all future generations of the world. He followed God from his father’s home, not knowing whither he went or what he would receive.

In the service that was most pleasing to God, the offering of his son as a sacrifice, which secured the promise, “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Abraham obeyed without a promise whether any blessing would be received. The obedience seemed to defeat the promise that God would of his son make a mighty nation. The antitype of Abraham’s offerings of his son was God offering his only Son to die for the world. This is continually held up as the great example given to man to follow. It places the truth beyond all controversy that God is best pleased with the service that is rendered him at great sacrifice, from love of him, without any promise of blessing. Job said: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” That is the service God loves. We have other thoughts along this line we wish to offer.³⁰

In addition to Lipscomb, there were others who also wrote against the practice of rebaptizing for the specific purpose of “for remission of sins.” For example, E. G. Swell (1830-1924), James A. Harding (1848-1922), John F. Rowe (1827-1897), F. B. Srygley (1859-1940), F.W. Smith (1858-1930), and J. C. McQuiddy (1858-1924).³¹ This cloud of witnesses did not make “remission of sins” the criterion whereby they determined if one’s baptism was authentic. This controversy still continues to rage like wild fire. Allen also refers to two other outstanding contemporary Church of Christ preachers—B. C. Goodpasture (1895-1977) and C. A. Norred (1888-1969)—that did not make a conscious understanding of “remission of sins” a prerequisite for sound baptism. In other words, they accepted those who had not been immersed expressly for this purpose.³²

³⁰David Lipscomb, “Rebaptism Reviewed,” *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 792-793; cited in Jimmy Allen, *Re-baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again* (Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1991), 99-108. I took the liberty of dividing Lipscomb’s long paragraphs into shorter paragraphs for ease of reading.

³¹ See Allen, *Re-baptism*, 108-126.

³² *Ibid.*, 131-138.

Alexander Campbell's Dialogue

Returning to the rebaptism controversy in 1832, Campbell develops forceful arguments against the procedure of rebaptism.³³ In order to expose what he considered fallacies in the arguments in favor of reimmersion, he sets up a dialogue on reimmersion between two fictitious characters—Alexander (A) and Rufus (R). Rufus argues for rebaptism and Alexander argues against rebaptism. In this dialogue, Campbell fights against rebaptizing individuals who were baptized upon the confession of faith in Jesus the Messiah, even though they may have labored under the impression that their sins were remitted six months before they were baptized. The following is Campbell's scenario in which he represents two individuals (Alexander and Rufus) discussing the subject of rebaptism:

- A. Have you really been baptized?
- R. Not re-baptized in my sense of the word; for I regard my former baptism as nothing better than infant sprinkling.
- A. If no better than infant sprinkling, you certainly ought to have been baptized. But you must mistake the meaning of that essay, if you suppose it regarded infant sprinkling as Christian immersion. It applies not to such a hypothesis. What I designate re-immersion, is the immersion of one a second time, who had voluntarily and understandingly confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God; and as such cheerfully submitted to him, and was immersed into his name as Mediator, as Prophet, Priest, and King. Were you not immersed upon such a profession some ten years ago?
- R. I was about that time immersed without understanding the meaning of it, and had no respect to the immersion of my sins in immersion: for I believed that I was forgiven six months before my immersion, through faith in the blood of Jesus.
- A. You had faith, then, in the blood of Jesus, and consequently regarded him as the Messiah.
- R. Yes: I had faith in him, indeed: but I was not immersed for the remission of my sins. I was immersed because Jesus was immersed in the Jordan, and because he commanded all believers to be immersed.
- A. And such a baptism as this you now say is no better than no baptism or than infant sprinkling. Does an infant act at all, does its understanding, will, affections, or conscience feel or act in reference to the example, authority, command, or promise of Jesus Christ? Surely you confound things that differ, the breath and length of heaven.
- R. Oh! There is some difference, indeed! But as touching the remission of sins, an infant as much expected it in its sprinkling, as I in my first immersion.
- A. That may be, for you say that you thought; nay, were assured, that your sins were remitted six months before you were immersed. But this, in my judgment, constitutes no reason why you should, after ten years citizenship in the kingdom of Christ, be again immersed. When I was naturalized a citizen of these United States, there were certain immunities and privileges attached to citizenship which I had not in my mind at that time, nor were they any inducement to me to be naturalized, any more than to that child now sleeping in the arms of its mother. But did that circumstance annul my naturalization and leave me an alien?
- R. I dare not say there was no church of Christ, no kingdom of God all this time. But I will say the church was in the wilderness.

³³ This series of dialogues on reimmersion occurred seventy-five years earlier than Lipscomb's article ("Rebaptism Reviewed") cited above.

- A. That helps you not. It was still a church, although it was in the wilderness; and this destroys your assumption. I admit that he who understands not fully the Lord's day, the Lord's supper, and Christian immersion, cannot fully enjoy the blessings of the gospel of Christ, and that it makes all the difference between the wilderness and the fruitful field to understand fully these institutions: but yet there are degrees both in faith and knowledge; and he that lives in the wilderness still lives.
- R. I am candid to confess that I did not foresee this impediment in my way. But, come, does this greatly detract from the importance which you and others attach to the discovery of the capital item of the ancient gospel—baptism for the remission of sins? This indeed is the only item that obtains for the ancient gospel the eminence that it claims.
- A. Not in the least. It stands true that this is its proper meaning. The not understanding of this institution has prevented many Christians from enjoying its benefits; but the not understanding it does not make them aliens from the kingdom of Jesus.³⁴

Dr. John Thomas' Controversy

The rebaptism debate, in part, began with Dr. John Thomas (1805-1871). The rediscovery of "remission of sins" associated with baptism was bound to lead, sooner or later, to someone's questioning whether baptism could be accurately administered to a person who did not understand that particular aspect of the ordinance. In the early stages of the Stone/Campbell Movement, Dr. Thomas was apparently **the first person to emphasize rebaptizing** those who did not understand "for the remission of sins" at the time of their baptism. Alexander Campbell quoted from the *Religious Herald*, a journal hostile to the Stone/Campbell Movement, which was eager to point out the differences between Campbell and Thomas on rebaptism. The article quickly points out Campbell's objection to Dr. Thomas' views and practice on rebaptism:

Progress of the Reformation—re-baptism—We understand that Mrs. Dr. Thomas was recently re-baptized for the remission of sins. Mrs. T. had previously been baptized on a profession of her faith, as we understand, by Mr. Burnet the Reformer. Recently her mind had become disquieted as to the validity of her baptism. Being confined to her room, and yet anxious to have the ordinance readministered, a bathing-tub was procured, carried into her room, filled with warm water, and Mrs. T. immersed for the remission of her sins, by Mr. Joseph Woodson, one of the members of the Sycamore church. Mr. Campbell objects to this amendment of his new theory—but who shall decide when Doctors disagree?³⁵

Campbell's "Extra" for December 1837 analyzed a number of opinions of Dr. Thomas that he regarded as discordant inclinations. One of these heretical trends was reimmersion of immersed believers. Campbell penned:

³⁴ Alexander Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-Immersion," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (March 5, 1832), 119-121. See also Campbell, "Dialogue," *Millennial* 3, no 5 (May 2, 1832): 220-224; *Ibid.*, no. 6 (June 7, 1832): 262-264; *Ibid.*, no.7 (July 2, 1832): 316-321.

³⁵ *Religious Herald*, "Sneers of the Enemy," quoted in the *Millennial Harbinger*, 7, no. 5 (May 1836): 231.

His re-immersion for the Baptists, and his no prayer system of preaching the word together with his representing all those immersed among the Baptists as immersed antichrist, are strong indications of the schismatical drift of our Apostolic Advocate.³⁶

This statement of Campbell concerning the Baptists is not a well-known fact, at least as far as I can detect in my conversations with various believers with a Church of Christ background.³⁷ Campbell entertained the notion, contrary to many Churches of Christ in the 20th century, that the Baptist were Christians. He opposed referring to the Baptist as “immersed antichrist.” But, in the very beginning of the Stone/Campbell Movement, the reformers considered all baptized believers as members of the church of Christ. As we read the primary sources, this acceptance of “other believers” in other denominations is self-evident.

Escalation of the Rebaptism Controversy

The rebaptism issue grew into the third most significant controversy to plague the Church of Christ.³⁸ The other two thorns were the missionary societies and the mechanical instruments of music.³⁹ This particular controversy over baptism “for the remission of sins” reached its zenith with Austin McGary (1846-1928). McGary established the *Firm Foundation* (September 1884) for the purpose of advocating rebaptism for those who did not understand “for the remission of sins” at the time of their baptism.⁴⁰ He contended that when a man believed in Jesus, repented of his sins, and was baptized in order to “obey God,” still, this obedience was not sufficient to become a child of God. We are **not** children of God until we are baptized purposely “for the remission of sins,”⁴¹ according to McGary. Lipscomb responds to this position by writing:

³⁶ Alexander Campbell, “Extra, No. 1—New Series,” *Millennial Harbinger* 1, (December 1837): 587.

³⁷ Campbell’s father also manifested this same attitude of brotherhood among the various denominations. For examples of this mindset, see Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* where he spoke of “brethren of all denominations,” in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1985, reprint), 91. Also, in the “Appendix” of the *Declaration and Address*, Campbell speaks of other believers as “churches of Christ” as well as brothers and Christians. Consider the following terms of endearment: “our brother,” “Christian brethren,” “our fellow-Christians,” “acknowledged brother,” “acknowledge each other as Christians,” “to our brethren,” “acknowledge each other as brethren, and love as children of the same father,” and “our dear brethren.” See also Leroy Garrett, “Baptists As Brothers,” *Restoration Review* 16, no. 3 (March 1974): 253—254.

³⁸ For a brief overview of this rebaptism controversy, see Leroy Garrett, “Restoration and Baptism,” *Restoration Review* 13, no. 10 (December 1971): 145—150. Also consult Earl Ervin West, *The Life and Times of David Lipscomb* (Henderson, TN: Religious Book Service, 1954), 225. See also Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 251-262.

³⁹ Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 251.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the *Firm Foundation*, see Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order: A History of the Restoration Movement 1849-1906* (Indiana: Religious book Service, 1950, 2:405-408. See also Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 251, 255.

⁴¹ See Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 252, where he says,

The crux of the issue centered primarily around the Baptists and immersed Methodists and Presbyterians, who sought membership in the church of Christ on the basis of their first immersion.

To take one truth or one motive out of a number given by God and say, “This one shall be understood, and the others need not be,” is to do violence to the order of God, and is to crystallize a sect around a truth, wrested from its God-given place, ignoring other truths just as important. This is to form a sect.⁴²

The battle rages over the practice of rebaptism; Lipscomb receives a letter of inquiry concerning the purpose of baptism: “Brother Lipscomb: What is baptism for, and what does John 3:5 mean?”⁴³ To this he replies:

The leading purpose of baptism is to bury the man dead through faith and repentance to the world out of himself and raise him in Christ Jesus. “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them [eis] in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit puts them into the enjoyment of all the blessings to be received in Christ, the blood of Christ, the remission of sins, the fellowship of God, Jesus Christ, and all the intelligences of the universe that are in fellowship with God.⁴⁴

Again, Lipscomb receives another question related to baptism:

Brother Lipscomb: Please answer in the columns of the Gospel Advocate if you do, or ever did, take the position that if a person came to you and said he believed that God for Christ’s sake had pardoned his sins, you would try to teach him better, but, if you could not, that you would take and baptize him in that condition, believing that he was already saved. Please answer, as you are accused by several brethren of taking that position several years ago. I am a little over a year old in the gospel.⁴⁵

To this question Lipscomb answers:

I have never found where God has ever suspended the acceptability of man’s service on man’s knowing the moment God rewarded the service, or the time and reason of a blessing. If he has done this, I do not see who can be saved. The highest type of faith is that of Abraham. He did God’s commands, left all and followed him, “not knowing whither he went. . . . God made many promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of blessing, and how and when the blessing would come. They, through having their spiritual vision clouded by their surroundings, failed to understand the nature or special time of the divine promises; yet God never withheld the promise when in obedience to him they came to the appointed place. Christ so often and so plainly told the apostles that he would be crucified and raised from the dead the third day; yet their minds were so preoccupied with other views that they did not see or understand or believe it. They failed to believe it because they did not see it. They had confidence in Jesus and faith in the truth of his teaching, but the preoccupation of their minds with the

Before McGary raised the issue, churches of Christ generally had accepted all immersed believers into their membership without requiring rebaptism although there may have been a fundamental difference of opinion regarding the purpose of baptism.

⁴² Lipscomb and Swell, *questions Answered* (Tennessee: McQuiddy Printing, 1921; reprint, (Tennessee: Gospel Advocate, 1974), 66 (page references are to reprint edition).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

idea of a temporal kingdom and earthly glory hindered their seeing the truth then. Jesus did not reject their service because they failed to see this, the most important item in his teaching. He knew, if led on to obey truly other truths they did see, that they would come to see the fullness of this truth.

Peter on Pentecost preached: “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off.” Yet he was slow to understand and believe the promise was to the Gentiles, because his prejudices were in the way. These prejudices were so blind when they were aroused, after he had opened the door to the Gentiles; they led him to refuse to eat with them as brethren. Yet his service was accepted. God makes allowance for human ignorance and human weakness, and accepts service despite much blindness and many errors, or we are all lost. It is only weak man, who imagines that he knows all truth that makes service depend upon a perfect understanding of God’s purpose and times.

. . .

The truth is, there are different motives given in the Bible to lead men to obedience. The highest, holiest motive to obedience is that which led Jesus—the desire to fulfill all righteousness—to do the will of God. I would fear much to meet Christ at the judgment seat of God if I rejected him who did what God commanded him, led by the motive that led Jesus Christ to obey him. When a man trusts God and honors him from the desire of obeying him, he acts from the motive that is more pleasing to God than any other. . . .

Jesus said: “Though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.” (John 10:30) If they could not believe through the words of Jesus, yet could believe through his works, he was willing to accept them. Take this as an example: A man is born and reared in a Presbyterian family. From childhood he is taught to believe that infant sprinkling and all the practices of the Presbyterian Church are right. He lives in all good conscience and tries to do the will of God. In reading the Bible, he sees that God requires men to believe, then be baptized. He sees that baptism is a burial. In his anxiety to do the will of God, he is baptized, before his attention has ever been directed to the fact that is “for the remission of sins”; but he is moved by the same motive that led Jesus to be baptized—a desire to fulfill all righteousness. Who will say that man’s baptism is not acceptable to God? Who will say he ought to defer a duty that he knows God requires at his hands until he learns all the blessings God will bestow, and just where and when each blessing will come in, and why it is bestowed? If that is necessary, no man can ever tell when he should be baptized. Such a contention arises from a very mistaken ideas of God’s character and of the ground of his mercy to man. The ground of God’s mercy to man is not that man understands and knows how God works or the point when and where he bestows his blessing; but it is that man is weak, sinful, helpless, willing to trust God and follow him, not knowing whither he leads. . . . It is not necessary to understand all truth before he obeys what he does understand.⁴⁶

Lipscomb versus McGary

As the debate continued, Lipscomb pressures McGary to deny that Alexander Campbell or Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) or “that host of heroes” were Christians because they were not baptized knowingly “for the remission of sins.” McGary boldly answers that if Campbell was not baptized “for the remission of sins,” then his baptism was null and void.⁴⁷ Undoubtedly McGary did not know that Campbell had not been baptized expressly “for the remission of sins,” since he called him “brother.” In addition to Lipscomb’s discussions, James A. Harding (1848-1922) also conducted written debates with Austin McGary and J. D. Tant (1861-1941) on

⁴⁶ Ibid., 65-67.

⁴⁷ See Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 257.

the subject of rebaptism.⁴⁸ Stephen Eckstein (1893-1975) calls attention to the castigation of a number of well-known reformers by McGary:

McGary retorted that Lipscomb and others who defended Baptist baptism were Cambellites. He sarcastically asserted that such men as J. W. McGarvey, F. W. Allen, Isaac Errett, J. A. Harding and J. M. Barnes of other states, Wilmeth and Rawlins, the Clarks, Carlton, McPherson, Homan and others taught that Baptists are “in Christ” and when they die, “strict Baptist, they go to rest in Jesus.”⁴⁹

Again, Eckstein (1893-1975) writes: “The *Christian Courier* asserted that the church was suffering from the ‘rebaptism hobby that is being furiously ridden’ by a faction among the Disciples of Christ.”⁵⁰ Another Journal (*Christian Messenger*) entered the rebaptism controversy. Once more Eckstein pens: “The *Christian Messenger* declared that rebaptism ‘is so preposterous that it seems no man or woman with intellect to be accountable could be deceived by it. Yet this delusion that is leading away hundreds of disciples in Texas at the present time.’”⁵¹

Tolbert Fanning

Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) also objected to rebaptizing those who were satisfied with their baptism, even Baptists. He composed the following thoughts on the subject: “We teach the Baptist the Christian religion and after understanding the great facts, if they are satisfied with their baptism, I know of no brother who would not fellowship them.”⁵² The acceptance of members from the Baptist church without rebaptism was wide spread among the early Reformation preachers. James R. Wilburn says,

Fanning and his associates, unlike their Baptist neighbors who commanded baptism “because of remission of sins, believed that immersion was necessary to salvation. Still, it was often the practice of preachers in the Churches of Christ to receive members into fellowship from the Baptist Church without rebaptism, even though the Baptist generally taught that salvation followed faith with baptism a subsequent event.”⁵³

Also, Wilburn quoted from the *Gospel Advocate* (1855—to present) and the *Christian Review* to substantiate this fact of not rebaptizing:

⁴⁸ For a more detailed review of this controversy, see *Ibid.*, 251-262.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁵² James R. Wilburn, *The Hazard of the Die: Tolbert Fanning and the Restoration Movement* (Texas: Sweet Publishing, 1969), 70.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

We received two additions from the sects without baptism, seven by baptism, one restored, and one confession [to be baptized later], or again, ‘The result of our meeting is nineteen additions to the cause of Primitive Christianity, four of whom were from the Baptist, and fifteen were immersed.’⁵⁴

Fanning delighted in the saying, “Though we are not the only Christians, we are Christians only.”⁵⁵ Wilburn further writes about Fanning’s refusal to deny that there were Christians among the denominations:

While Fanning continually censored division, he was not prepared to deny that there were Christians in the denominations that he saw around him. “That there are Christians in confusion,” said he, “we doubt not,” and then later he wrote, “While we could cheerfully fellowship all who are pure and of good report in the denominations, should we admit the divine origin of any sect, this fact alone would certainly afford unmistakable evidence of insincerity.”⁵⁶

Harding versus Tant

Lloyd Sears (1895-1986), in his biography of James A. Harding (1848-1922), describes one incident that should serve as a valuable practical example for Christians today. As he explains:

On the “rebaptism” issue, which was threatening to divide the church, J. D. Tant was invited to give a series of lectures opposing the views of Harding and Lipscomb. L. S. Chambers relates that he was surprised to see Harding, after a lecture, put his arm around Tant and walk with him across the campus to Harding’s home for dinner. He learned to his astonishment and his great joy that “brethren could be brethren though they differed.”⁵⁷

A lesson about brotherly love existed in their relationship to one another and to God. This attitude did not last long among Christians. Around the turn of the century, as mentioned above in the “Lipscomb versus McGary” controversy, the rebaptism question again posed one of the greatest threats to the unity of the Spirit. With the rise of the *Firm Foundation* (1844—to present), this issue of contention reached its zenith—division occurred. In the face of great turmoil, Lipscomb and Harding and Sewell (1830-1924) still objected to rebaptism. Sears wrote about these three and the *Gospel Advocate* staff:

On this issue David Lipscomb, Harding, E. G. Sewell, and the Advocate staff and readers in general held that the only requirements for baptism which are stipulated by Jesus and the apostles were a faith in Jesus as the Son of God, repentance, and confession.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., cited from both the *Gospel Advocate* I (May 1855): 154, and from the *Christian Review* 2 (September 1845): 197.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lloyd Cline Sears, *The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James Alexander Harding* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970), 146.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 178.

Sewell also responded to this controversy in *Questions Answered*. Someone (name withheld by Sewell) posed the question:

Brother Sewell: Do Baptists baptize individuals into the Baptist Church or into the church of Christ? If into the church of Christ, how do they get into the Baptist Church? If into the Baptist Church, how must one proceed to come from the Baptist Church into church of Christ?⁵⁹

The following citation is Sewell's reaction to the above question:

I do not read one word about any Baptist Church in the New Testament, and, therefore, not a word about any one ever having been baptized into a Baptist Church. Hence, I shall not attempt to answer how such an unscriptural thing can be done, except to say that no such thing can be done by divine authority by any one. Nor do I read of any one ever having been baptized into the church of Christ. I do read of people being baptized into Christ and "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." I read also, plainly, that Paul and the Romans "were baptized into Christ." ("Rom. 6:3)

Then, again, I read where Christ said, when speaking of himself as the Son of God: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Mt. 16:18) I learn also that the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is rendered church, means literally the "called-out ones." Therefore the word church means the people that obey the gospel and are thus called out of the world into Christ. The word church, therefore, does not mean a denomination, but it means the Lord's people on earth; and these make up the spiritual body of Christ, but in no modern sense of that word a denomination.

The whole idea of a Baptist Church, and that such a church is a denomination, is purely human. There is nothing of that sort one single time named in the New Testament. Study the word church as given in the New Testament more closely, and you will not trouble yourself nor others about people being baptized into the Baptist Church. The whole idea is a human invention not once named in all the oracles of God.

The matter of being baptized into Christ, and that whenever this is done they are the Lord's people, is plainly revealed, but not in any sense as a Baptist denomination. I have been preaching for about sixty-two years, and have never had any one to come forward to unite with the church of Christ that said he had been baptized into the Baptist Church. If such a one ever does, I will try to teach and treat him as the word of God directs. . . . But I have found a number of people that said that when they were baptized they did it in submission to the will of God, and they were encouraged to all at once take their stand among those who are simply Christians and to live the Christian life as the word of God directs. So I am in no dilemma in regard to the questions you ask.

But those that require all those who have been baptized to do God's will to be baptized again, "having in view that baptism is for the remission of sins," are the ones that are in the ditch, there being no authority in the word of God for any such procedure. There is but one way to get into the church of Christ, and that is by a humble obedience to the gospel of Christ. But I am under no obligation to try to tell how to get into the Baptist Church, as no such church is revealed in the word of God.⁶⁰

From the above response by Sewell, one can surmise that there is no such thing as a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or, for that matter, a Church of Christ Church. There is only one *body*

⁵⁹ Lipscomb and Sewell, *Questions Answered* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), 49.

⁶⁰Ibid., 49-50. The above citation as appears as one paragraph in the original source, but I (Dallas Burdette) have taken the privilege of creating a number of paragraphs for ease of reading.

and that *body* consists of all those who put their trust in Jesus for salvation. The *ekklesia* of Christ had its origin in God and its beginning on the fiftieth day after Passover. From that day to this day, everyone who responds to the Gospel of Christ through repentance and baptism is added to God's community (church) on earth.

REFORMATION VERSUS RESTORATION

The question that confronts every believer is: Is the Stone/Campbell Movement a Reformation Movement or Restoration Movement? The Stone/Campbell Movement started out as a Reformation Movement, but this call for reform eventually degenerated into a Restoration Movement. In other words, the Stone/Campbell Movement crystallized into another denomination.⁶¹ In its early stages the reformers were seeking to bring about reform within the existing churches, but, as time went on, many in this movement came to the conclusion that the church needed to be restored—there were no Christians in the denominations. This failure to make a distinction between the words *reformation* and *restoration* has created warring factions on every corner—each claiming to be the restored church. Rebaptism is a product of the *restoration mindset*.

Is there a valid distinction between a *reformation* movement and a *restoration* movement? An analysis of these two concepts reveals the distinguishing characteristics of these two various philosophies. For example, a Reformation Movement recognizes Christians in existing churches, that is to say, other Christian fellowships, and also seeks to bring about reform within the surviving movement. On the other hand, a Restoration Movement labors under the impression that the church ceased to exist and must be restored—such as the Anabaptist movement.⁶²

The Campbells as well as other reformation preachers recognized that there were Christians in the denominations, but, nevertheless, they all sought to bring about reform within the Christian community. This is the same mind-set that earlier reformers—John Wycliff, (1330-1384), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564)—sought to accomplish. In other words these three men sought to bring about reformation within the existing church. But, on the other hand, Zwingli's movement was a true Restoration Movement.⁶³

REBAPTISM IN ACTS 19

Acts 19 is appealed to by many Christians to uphold the practice of rebaptizing those who did not understand “for the remission of sins” at the time of their baptism. Acts 19 is often cited

⁶¹Out of this Reformation Movement evolved three distinct fellowships: (1) Churches of Christ, (2) Christian Churches, and (3) Disciples of Christ. Then, from these three separate fellowships, there are many subdivisions within each group—each distinctive party claiming to be the “one true church.”

⁶²The Anabaptist did not recognize other believers as Christians. They believed that the church needed to be restored, not reformed. This attitude is similar to some Churches of Christ. See C. Leonard and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988) for a thorough analysis of the distinction between a Reformation Movement and a Restoration Movement. Again, as mentioned above, it would be helpful for one to consult Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 1—23, for a brief overview of the dissimilarity between the two concepts.

⁶³For a Brief overview of the impact of these men, see Leonard and Hughes, *Ancestry*, 21-34.

as proof-text for this demand for rebaptism. The question of rebaptism still confuses many concerned Christians. Is there ever any reason for one to be rebaptized? Luke informs Theophilus that Paul rebaptized some believers at Ephesus because they had not been baptized “into the name of the Lord Jesus,” but rather they had previously been baptized under John’s baptism. The question is: Is this act of rebaptism in Ephesus a valid reason to rebaptize those who were baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) according to Jesus’ instructions to the disciples? Alexander Campbell’s “Dialogue on Re-immersion” goes right to the heart of the matter in differentiating between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of John. He writes:

- A. (Alexander). They say they had not heard the name of the Holy Spirit mentioned as given. This at once astonished Paul. Why, says he, into what name, not for what gift, were you immersed, seeing you have not heard of the Holy Spirit? I need not repeat their answer. Paul was no longer astonished. He knew the name of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus went together; and that John immersed into no name. He only preached that they should believe in him that was to come after him. Paul explained the subject to them. When they heard this they were immersed *into* the name of the Lord Jesus. No special purpose of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in or after baptism. For they received this gift by imposition of hands. . . . Paul laid his hands on them; they were baptized with a special reference to this gift. I need not now say to you that there is no authority for supposing that they did not receive baptism in its full sense; because there is no special exclusion of any one blessing common to others, nor reference to any one blessing as especially to be sought in the institution. No person, I think has authority to say they were not immersed for the remission of sins, or that they were immersed exclusively for the Holy Spirit; both of which seem to have been taken for granted by you, friend Matthias.⁶⁴

The thrust of the command for rebaptism centered on: “into the name of the Lord Jesus.” In other words, baptism is into *what name*, not *what gift*.

Context and Acts 19

What is Acts 19 concerned with? This episode at Ephesus is a classic example of some who were reimmersed. But, why were they reimmersed? When one embarks upon an answer, one must always consult context.⁶⁵ The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that we are studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God’s written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps us to determine the meaning or meanings that we attach to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, we, as interpreters, may impose conjectured convictions on a text

⁶⁴ Campbell, “Dialogue on Re-immersion,” *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 5 (May 2, 1832): 222.

⁶⁵ The word *context*, as the etymology intimates, means the connection of thought supposed to run through every passage that constitutes by itself a whole. In analyzing context, one discovers that there is the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1886, reprint, nd), 210 for an excellent treatment on context.

without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, our particular context tends to shape our understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, “An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history.”⁶⁶

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. We must not employ Holy Scriptures in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. It is the context that informs us as to the reasoning of Paul in demanding their baptism “into the name of the Lord Jesus.” The context reveals that they were not baptized “into the name of the Lord Jesus.”⁶⁷

The reason assigned for rebaptism in Acts 19 has to do with an inadequate or false fundamental teaching concerning baptism in the name of Jesus. John’s baptism looked toward the coming of the Son of God, but Jesus had come. Now, everything, which includes baptism, must be done “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). There is no justification for the modern practice of rebaptizing individuals who were baptized “into the name of the Lord Jesus.” Whether we are baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” or “into the name of the Lord Jesus”—both are synonymous. After Peter’s sermon about God’s plan of salvation in the home of Cornelius, he, too, “ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48).

As we reflect upon baptism as practiced by other Christians, we observe that they too baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In the words of Jesus as reported by Mark: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Anyone who believes and is baptized “in [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” has a baptism that is as solid as a rock. We are not required to fully understand the efficacy of baptism in order for it to be pleasing and acceptable to God. If we are obedient to the Gospel of Christ because of our faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world, then, that our baptism is legitimate.

Campbell, as well as many other reformers, saw emphatically the disastrous consequences of any other view. For this reason Campbell wrote:

Let me once more say, that the only thing which can justify reimmersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is a confession on the part of the candidate that he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God—that he died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, at the time of his first immersion—that he now believes the testimony of the

⁶⁶ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

⁶⁷ Obviously, there are other reasons for individuals to be reimmersed. For instance, if a person is lacking in either faith or repentance at the time of baptism, then this lack of faith or repentance would make null and void the act of baptism. Again, if one is baptized to follow the crowd or if one is baptized in order to receive a handout from the church, then one’s baptism is invalid. If a person is baptized in order to satisfy a nagging husband or wife, then that person’s baptism is unacceptable. If one is baptized to accomplish some unworthy purpose, then that individual’s baptism is worthless. One must act on the right motive—an aim to obey God. If one’s objective is to obey God, then when one is baptized “into the name of the Lord Jesus,” then that person can rest upon the assurance that his or her baptism is acceptable to Almighty God.

Apostles concerning him, and desires to be buried and rise with Christ in faith to a resurrection to eternal life. The instant that rebaptism is preached and practiced on any other ground than that now stated—such as deficient knowledge, weak faith, a change of views—then have we contradicted in some way and made void the word of the Lord—“He who will believe and be immersed shall be saved”—then have we abandoned the principles of the present reformation, instituted experience meetings, committees for examining candidates, changed the bond of union, and made something else than belief of the gospel facts the faith of the gospel.”⁶⁸

MANY BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH BAPTISM

We cannot deny that the Holy Spirit associates various gifts, effects, blessings, and fellowship with the Trinity in water baptism. The following is a brief list of benefits associated with baptism: (1) forgiveness of sins [Acts 2:38],⁶⁹ (2) union with Christ [Galatians 3:26ff], release from the power and guilt of sin as well as sharing in the risen life of the Redeemer (3) [Romans 6:1-11] and (4) regeneration [Titus 3:5]. In water baptism, God showers many blessings upon penitent sinners. God in his infinite wisdom has prepared a way for man to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Savior of the world (Romans 6:3-5).

The question that confronts us is: Must we understand the full implications concerning the benefits associated with baptism and, at the same time, possess full knowledge about baptism in Matthew 28:18-19? For example, Jesus informs His disciples that when one is baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), then that person enters into a covenant relationship with the Trinity. But how many understand, at the time of their baptism, this particular blessing designated in water baptism? How many understand that God gives “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) at the time of baptism as an earnest of his/her inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14).⁷⁰

If we believe and are baptized in compliance with Mark 16:16,⁷¹ is our baptism valid? If our baptism is not valid, then we cannot help but wonder, why not? One objective of baptism is to rise with Him through the faith of the operation of God (Colossians 2:12).⁷² Must we be aware of all the implications in the various viewpoints about baptism for it to be genuine? Does the weight of our baptism depend upon our awareness that baptism is “for the remission of sins? Or does the authenticity of our baptism rest upon our belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

⁶⁸ Alexander Campbell, “Re-immersion and Brother Thomas,” *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 2 (February 1836): 63.

⁶⁹ Ananias expresses the same truth in exhortation to Paul concerning his response to the Lord: “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

⁷⁰ “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

⁷¹ “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16).

⁷² “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11-12).

God? The question that confronts every believer is: Is it *what* we believe about baptism that matters, or is it in *whom* we believe that determines the realness of baptism?

J. M. Powell (1907-2004) lists twenty-two purposes for being baptized. Must one get the picture of each and every reason for baptism before it is valid? The following is a brief description of the twenty-two objectives accomplished in baptism as enumerated by Powell:

There are many purposes of water baptism mentioned in the New Testament; among which we mention the following. **1.** Salvation, (Mark 16:16); **2.** Sins remitted, (Acts 2:38); **3.** Sins washed away, (Acts 22:16); **4.** Puts on Christ, (Galatians 3:27); **5.** Puts off past sins, (Colossians 2:11, 12); **6.** Gets one into Christ (Galatians 3:27); **7.** Gets one into the body of Christ, (1 Corinthians 12:13); **8.** Call on the name of the Lord, (Acts 22:16); **9.** The right to wear the name of Christian (1 Corinthians 1:10-15); **10.** Raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12); **11.** Becomes a child of God, (Galatians 3:26,27); **12.** Sins are forgiven, (Sins are forgiven (Colossians 2:11, 12); **13.** Becomes a new creature, (2 Corinthians 5:17); **14.** Contacts the blood of Christ, (Romans 6:3, 4); **15.** Receives a good conscience, (1 Peter 3:21); **16.** Cleansed, (Ephesians 5:26); **17.** Set apart for Christian worship and service (Ephesians 5:26); **18.** Baptized into the death of Christ, (Romans 6:3, 4); **19.** Born again (John 3:3-5); **20.** Receives all spiritual blessings in Christ, (Ephesians 1—3); **21.** Added to the Lord's church, (Acts 2:41, 47); **22.** We are baptized into the name of Christ, (Matthew 28:19).⁷³

Baptized into Nothing?

With some Christians, one's baptism is nothing if it is performed by other fellowships who do not baptize with the specific formula "for the forgiveness of sins." In other words, when other churches baptize individuals, it is into *nothing*, not into Christ. This position on baptism is the reason why many Christians within the Churches of Christ do not recognize other believers' baptisms. Jimmy Allen (1930-2020, professor of Bible at Harding University, responds to this kind of attitude in his book on *Re-Baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again*:

Baptized Into Nothing

Objection:

If one believes there are scripturally immersed people in denominations, he must believe a person can be baptized into nothing. A fellow Christian said,

Some strange brethren among us take the position that one can be scripturally baptized into a denominational church. His sins are forgiven they say but he begins worshipping in error. If he learns the truth, upon confessing his error, not being baptized again, Christ will accept him into His church, it is supposed. Is it possible to be baptized into nothing? In the eyes of the Lord denominational churches are not part of his plan to save man and do not exist!!! The church of our Lord DOES exist and one MUST be baptized into the Body of Christ that is the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:21-22).

⁷³ J. M. Powell, *The Cause We Plead: A Story of the Restoration Movement* (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1987), 178.

Response:

1. It is wondered if Lipscomb, Harding [1898-1977], Sewell, McQuiddy, Srygley, et.al. were “strange brethren” because they believed there were born-again people in denominational groups. Our brother thinks some of us are strange because we do not agree with him. Strange means “not according to the ordinary way.” Had he lived a hundred years ago, his would have been the minority view, and he would have been regarded as “strange.” Obviously, labels do not prove beliefs to be either right or wrong.

2. The objection does not allow for division to exist in the body of Christ. It is wrong for brethren to be divided (1 Cor. 1:10-15); however, division does exist. Suppose one in the anti-cooperation fellowship should immerse a person who understood sins were remitted in baptism. Would the individual not be made part of the body of Christ because the anti-cooperatives are not in fellowship with us? This same reasoning can be applied to the anti-Bible class people, one-container brethren, instrumental-music folks, and those in the premillennial movement. All teach that immersion is essential to salvation, but each has a distinct fellowship. Are they baptizing into nothing?

3. No one is scripturally baptized into a denomination, and this is true of those whom we immerse, although they may initially have a denominational view of the church. One can be baptized in obedience to God’s command (Mark 16:16) and at the same time have the mistaken view that immersion makes him a member of a party. He is wrong about the party, but he is right about obedience. Repeatedly, it is said in this work that it is obedience to the truth that causes the Lord to add one to the body, which is the church. If the error held invalidates the truth, then no one received remission at baptism, since all of us had some misconceptions when we were immersed. All honest people will admit that because of ignorance and misunderstanding, they still do not know everything about water baptism.⁷⁴

Campbell and the Baptism Formula

The stature of Alexander Campbell warrants the inclusion again of a quote from Robert Richardson (1806-1876) in which he expresses the sentiments of Campbell’s feeling about the enforcement or use of formulas in baptizing. Richardson writes:

Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the “power of remitting sins” and “washing away sins in baptism.” “These,” said he, “have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth, and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers.” The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, “Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and forebore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression “for the remission of sins.” “When any doctrine,” said he (Mill. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), “is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes.”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jimmy Allen, *Re-Baptism?* 191-192. See also Allen’s section on “Response to Objections and Question,” 139-216. Another informative essay is his “Into What Were You Baptized,” 217-245.

⁷⁵ Richardson, *Memoirs*, vol., 2, 288.

CONCLUSION

The early reformers were not immersed with a consciousness of “remission of sins” flashing like neon lights at the time of their baptisms. The pioneers set forth their objections to the practice of rebaptizing individuals who were baptized upon the confession of their faith that Jesus is the Son of God. This chapter has drawn upon original sources to set forth the beliefs of sincere godly men. We observe from this composition that equally devout men advanced different views. This essay has sought to present the players in the Stone/Campbell Movement in their own historical setting in order to draw the present day readers into the thinking and arguments of the original preachers and editors of the new reform movement against the practice of reimmersion.

Since the reformers give a clear picture of their own thoughts, then this in-depth study of baptism gives lengthy citations from the original fountains. Even though many of the quotes are quite lengthy, nevertheless, the citations are worth repeating at some length. In view of the fact that many of their original sayings have been divorced from their historical dimension, this paper has sought a reconciliation of the *Sitz im Leben*⁷⁶ (social setting) for a proper interpretation of the intended meanings by the reformers. In seeking an answer to this perplexing problem of reimmersion, it is the duty of every believer to apply sound methods of exegesis⁷⁷ to the original texts of Scripture.

This extended survey of “Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement” should assist many Christians to exercise more toleration toward those who have not arrived at the same conclusions as themselves. Every prayer to God should call upon God to help all believers to understand that the overriding factor in baptism is our desire to obey God. The Scriptures teach that anyone baptized into the name of Jesus is a part of God’s kingdom. One’s longing to submit to God is the dominant principle for legitimacy in any baptism.

⁷⁶ See Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 155, where he says,

Sitz im Leben. A German phrase meaning “setting in life,” that is, the particular life setting in which a teaching was given or formulated. In form and redaction criticism, *Sitz im Leben* may be the situation in which Jesus gave a teaching, the situation of the church as it preserved and expressed the teaching, or the situation to which the Gospel writer was addressing the final form of the teaching.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 53, where he writes: “**Exegesis.** The obtaining of the meaning of a passage by drawing the meaning out from rather than reading it into the text.”