

## *Water Baptism as a Sacrament?*

This has the merit, at least, of realising that the context absolutely rules out, as being woefully inadequate, the notion of a symbol in Romans 6. We are, most decidedly, thinking of a baptism that is effectual. But, granting that, in light of Romans 4 how can anybody think that a rite – water baptism – can regenerate and therefore lead to justification? Circumcision couldn't. The law couldn't. And yet, we are told, water can! Are we to believe that Paul was teaching that water baptism actually regenerates a sinner, and unites him to Christ: that by water baptism a sinner dies with Christ, is buried with Christ, is raised, ascended and seated with Christ?

Surely not! For this, too, is utterly ruled out by the context. It suffers from the same flaw as the previous suggestion; namely, that if Paul in Romans 6 was talking about water baptism, instead of ascending in his doctrine in this chapter, he was actually descending from the previous lofty heights to... to a rite – a sacramental rite, let it be said, in the eyes of sacramentalists – but a rite, all the same. And a rite administered by a fellow-sinner! To speak of salvation by grace through faith, of union with Christ from eternity to eternity (with not the slightest whiff of a suggestion of water baptism), as he did in chapters 3, 4 and 5, and then to descend to a rite – without the slightest intimation that he was thinking in such terms – is stretching credibility far beyond all reasonable limits, however elastic those limits. It is ludicrous to think that Paul would leave his ever-rising track of Romans 3, 4 and 5, and degrade the force of his argument in order to descend to a discussion of water baptism – when, as I have shown, he was tackling a direct challenge to his argument in those chapters. The suggestion is as risible as the first. Whatever else Paul was doing in Romans 6, he was further ascending in his argument – not descending. The punch-line can hardly be a rite, can it?

But, if the sacramentalist continues to insist that Paul was speaking of water baptism in Romans 6, then the inevitable has to be faced. The context, the apostle's argument – its very dynamic – means that water baptism plays a vital part in uniting a sinner to

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Christ. No! That's too weak! It means far more than that! If the sacramentalist is right, water baptism plays the clinching part in uniting a sinner to Christ. Water baptism is the *sine qua non*. Preaching the gospel, faith, repentance... yes... have their part (Romans 3 – 5), of course they do, but these only lead to water baptism (Romans 6). The truth is, it is water baptism which actually unites the sinner to Christ. Water baptism is the climax of the gospel in its application to the sinner. Water baptism is the hinge, the vital node, in this 'critical path'; water baptism, not repentant faith in Christ.

Romans 6:3-4 is not unique, of course. There are several other passages which speak of baptism in similar terms: 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Peter 3:21. These passages, like Romans 6:3-4, all make huge claims for the power and efficacy of the baptism in question. We dare not minimise or water down (no pun intended!) those claims. That must be the golden rule here. Let the apostles state their case and make their claims. And let us accept them! Whatever the baptism in question is, it does not *represent* the grace spoken of; it *conveys* it, it *produces* the grace spoken of. And all who have received the baptism in question, without exception receive the grace spoken of. There must be no talk such as: 'All who are baptised are not necessarily joined to Christ', even though this is precisely how most sacramentalists do talk! Take the Westminster Confession Chapter 28, for instance, which, when talking of water baptism, declares:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving [being given?] up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life... Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptised. Yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated. The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such

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(whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.

As you can see, reader, what the Confession gives with one hand, it (ineffectively, vainly) tries to take away with the other. For, although 'grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto [baptism]... that all that are baptised are undoubtedly regenerated', 'yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto'! And, don't forget, it's what the people take away from the font that counts. If their metaphysical teachers are not certain about all the ins and outs, they themselves *are* sure that 'something good has been done to the baby'. The message is plain: grace is conferred in baptism.

Now the various biblical passages sacramentalists are so fond of quoting – and repeating at the ceremony – all say, categorically, that grace does come through the baptism, always comes through the baptism, so that all who are baptised are in Christ. And there is never an exception in the pages of the New Testament. Some sacramentalists have the courage of their convictions, and assert all that are baptised are regenerate. Most parents who go through the system are pretty sure of it. Why can't all sacramentalists say the same?

Let us call a spade a spade: *we are speaking of baptismal regeneration*. Whether it's Rome, Anglicans or Presbyterians or whatever, we are talking about baptismal regeneration. And Romans 6:1-11 is the principal passage for the doctrine. That is what Paul teaches here – baptismal regeneration, baptismal union to Christ in his death and resurrection. Sinners by baptism are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Sinners by baptism are taken out of the flesh and brought into the Spirit, taken out of Adam and brought into Christ, out of the realm of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. This is a fact. There is no doubt about it.

As a consequence, no words can be too strong to describe the place and importance of the baptism in question. And if this is water baptism, then water baptism it is! Water baptism ought to be our theme; water baptism ought to be the high point of our gospel exhortations, when we address sinners with the gospel. Water

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baptism! Water baptism! We should hear it everywhere. Do we? In Scripture, I mean.

And this takes us to the wider context.

### ***Consider the wider context***

As I have said, if water baptism is the crux of conversion, we should meet ‘baptism’ everywhere throughout the New Testament. It should be the constant theme.

Let this sink in. If sacramentalists are right, water baptism is the principal thing. Throughout the New Testament, it should be placarded in addresses to sinners, and it should feature heavily in discussions of the theology of salvation. Water baptism should be the recurring theme, the resounding theme, for it is by water baptism that souls are regenerated. Jesus’ categorical statement to Nicodemus: ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit... You must be born again’ (John 3:3-8) is completely fulfilled, and only fulfilled, in and through water baptism. When Paul wrote to Titus and said: ‘[God] saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life’ (Tit. 3:5-7), he was talking about the power and efficacy of water baptism. So what are we waiting for? Let’s be up and at it! Let’s baptise as many as we can and turn them all into Christians! Let’s re-write the words of Christ:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is *baptised in water*... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is *baptised in water*... You must be *baptised in water*.

The truth is, when reading the apostolic addresses to sinners in the New Testament, we shouldn’t have to hunt for water baptism; it should be written large for all to see.

But... is this what we find in the New Testament? Is it? Where? Where, in any address to sinners, is water baptism made the heart of the way for a sinner to be saved from his sins? Sinners are called, invited, commanded to repent and believe – and promised

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salvation if they do. True, they are commanded to be baptised after that – but never commanded to be baptised to be united to Christ. Never. When addressing sinners, water baptism is never made the lynchpin of salvation. Never. The silence is deafening. Therefore the sacramentalist premise regarding Romans 6 must be wrong.<sup>1</sup>

Take one example. As Paul, writing to the Ephesians, and reminding them of their conversion, said:

You... 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 (Eph. 1:13-14).

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<sup>1</sup> And if an objector should raise the several passages in Acts which do seem to link baptism and conversion in the way the sacramentalist would like, he will find he has bitten off more than he can chew. Having written on this at length elsewhere (see my *Baptist* pp195-205), I now simply quote the words of a leading Baptist sacramentalist, Stanley K.Fowler. Make no mistake, reader, if the sacramentalist could make a convincing case from Acts, he would not fail to do it. But as Fowler admitted: 'The book of Acts... the evidence [for sacramental teaching] is not as consistent as one [that is, a sacramentalist] might like[!]... There is no simple cause-effect relation between baptism and the gift of the Spirit... It would be unwarranted to construct a baptismal paradigm from such an exceptional case [as the Samaritans in Acts 8]... The evidence of Acts does not allow for easy harmonisation... The initial movement of the gospel into the Gentile world can hardly be a timeless paradigm; its revolutionary character is the reason for its unusual form... If there is a normative understanding of the relation between baptism and the Spirit in Acts... Acts 2:38 would then acquire special significance... The evidence of the narratives of Acts may be ambiguous... Relating this systematic perspective [of the assumed encounter with Christ and his Spirit in baptism] to the narratives of Acts is admittedly problematic, but this is true for every systematic perspective, given the obvious diversity of the narratives' (Stanley K.Fowler: *More than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, 2006, pp159-161,220). Those important concessions were made by a leading Baptist sacramentalist, don't forget. And, of course, in Acts we have the conversions of the eunuch, Saul, the people in Cornelius' house, Lydia, the jailer, and so on – all without baptism *until they had shown clear signs that they had been converted*. Indeed, the thief on the cross was never baptised, yet he was saved (Luke 23:42-43).

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It could not be clearer: we come into Christ by hearing the gospel – effectually hearing the gospel, by the Spirit – and believing, trusting Christ. Not a drop of water in sight! If water baptism is the *sine qua non*, ‘the one thing needful’, Paul could not possibly have left it out of his reminder to the Ephesians.

What is more, if water baptism is the one great and necessary work, why did Jesus issue his final command:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

As Mark recorded it:

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

In whichever form we read it, the command is plain. Yes, we have to baptise – but we baptise believers, not unbelievers. We baptise *after* we have preached the gospel to sinners and they have become believers. In other words, we baptise converts; we do not baptise in order to convert. Those we baptise must be regenerate – and give clear signs of it by their faith in Christ – before we baptise them. So said Christ. Those who claim that baptism regenerates contradict Christ. Christ said: ‘Believe and be baptised’; the sacramentalist says: ‘Be baptised and (we hope you) believe’. Indeed, if water baptism accomplishes so much, why is there any need for faith?<sup>2</sup> And why bother to preach? Why not baptise and leave it at that? If water baptism is sacramental, why is the call for baptism absent in New Testament addresses to unbelievers, and why is there so great an emphasis upon preaching, repentance and faith?

And then we have 1 Corinthians 1:13-17. Surely we must all agree that the apostle *is* talking about water baptism in 1 Corinthians 1:13-17. Everybody accepts *that*... don’t they? Of course they do.

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<sup>2</sup> The same question is to be asked of those who hold to eternal justification. See my *Eternal* pp109-115.

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So, then, let us see what that passage tells us about the ordinance of water baptism. Does it support the sacramentalist case? It ought to – and strongly, at that – if water baptism accomplishes regeneration and all the rest.

### ***1 Corinthians 1:13-17***

Let me quote the passage

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptise any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptised into my name. (Yes, I also baptised the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Preaching, not baptism, is the priority in the New Testament – and not just in the matter of time sequence, the order of events. Paul says so here. According to the apostle, preaching has priority over baptism in a far deeper way than mere time. In the context of this particular passage, Paul is comparing – contrasting – preaching and baptism as to their power, their place, their weight, their relative importance... Reader, I am hunting for the right word. Paul is not talking about preaching preceding baptism in time only. He is saying that preaching and baptism are chalk and cheese when it comes to the business of fetching sinners out of Adam and bringing them into Christ. Until you have converts, you can't baptise! And you get converts by preaching the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament, preaching – not baptising – is the means God uses to call sinners to Christ, and apply the benefits of his redemption to them. Yes, indeed! That is what Paul said, and that is what Paul meant.

'I have begotten you through the gospel', Paul declared (1 Cor. 4:15, NKJV). How does God bring this about? As he had already reminded the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:13-17), it was *not* by baptism! So how was it? James supplies the answer: '[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth' (Jas. 1:18). 'The word of truth'

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<sup>3</sup> Preaching is far wider than pulpit work, of course. See both my *The Priesthood of All Believers; Slogan or Substance?* and my *The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry: Its Basis and Practice*.

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certainly means the Scriptures, the gospel (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15; see also 1 Pet. 1:23 with Heb. 4:12). ‘Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ’ (Rom. 10:17). Preaching the gospel, the sinner hearing the message and exercising saving faith, with not a mention of baptism!

But I think there is something more. ‘[God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth’ also includes God’s decree, his authoritative command – as his effective word at creation: ‘For God, who said: “Let light shine out of darkness”, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6). In short, God uses the preaching of the gospel to regenerate and convert his elect – and he does it in some mysterious, but effective, sovereign, way like in his fiat at creation: ‘And God said: “Let there be light”, and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3). ‘The law of the LORD [which, in new-covenant terms, is the entire Scripture]<sup>4</sup> is perfect, converting the soul’ (Ps. 19:7, NKJV). As Thomas Manton put it: ‘Without grace I cannot be saved; without the word I cannot have grace... The divine grace does all; he begets us; but remember, it is by the word of truth’.<sup>5</sup>

And this is why Paul majored on preaching. Preaching is the means God uses to bring sinners to salvation. Not baptism!

Let me offer some further evidence that this is, indeed, what Paul is saying. First of all, glance at the context of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:13-17; that is, 1 Corinthians 1:1 – 4:21. What do we find? Baptism? Really? Leaving aside 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 for the moment, the suggestion is ludicrous. Paul is writing to the saints – sinners who have been called into union with Christ by regeneration leading to repentance and faith. (To cite individual verses would be superfluous; the entire passage is replete with the point). But how were the Corinthians regenerated? By baptism? As I say, the suggestion is ludicrous. The opening chapters of 1 Corinthians constitute the greatest declaration in Scripture of the priority of gospel preaching in the calling of sinners. Baptism? No!

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<sup>4</sup> See my *Psalm 119 and the New Covenant*.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Manton: *An Exposition on the Epistle of James*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1962, p119.



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Not a whiff of a suggestion of it. Preaching? Yes! I agree with the sacramentalists that Paul was not minimising baptism. Of course not. *But he was maximising preaching!* As he was in this:

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I *preached* to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I *preached* to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we *preach*, and this is what you believed. But if it is *preached* that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our *preaching* is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have *testified* about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised (1 Cor. 15:1-15).

Then again, as he explained, although he had baptised so few of the Corinthians, he had been used to bring many of them to faith (1 Cor. 4:15). They had been baptised, yes, of course. But they were baptised only after they had heard him preach, and believed: ‘Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard [Paul] believed and were baptised’ (Acts 18:8). Believed and were baptised – not were baptised and so came to faith.

In light of all this, we need be in no doubt; we should be in no doubt. For Paul, preaching and not baptism is the means God uses to bring sinners to a saving experience. Preaching, not baptism!

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But it was true not only for Paul. It is true for all of us for all time. It was, after all, the way Christ went about his work. The ultimate end and purpose of his coming into the world was, of course, to offer the one effectual propitiating sacrifice of himself upon the cross. But what was the main thrust and driving force of his life leading up to Calvary? He worked miracles, yes, but above all Jesus was a preacher of the gospel. It is no accident that Mark opened his account of Christ thus: ‘Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel’ (Mark 1:14, NKJV). How did Luke record Christ’s first works after his baptism and temptation? ‘Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and... he taught in their synagogues... He went to Nazareth... and on the sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read... He rolled up the scroll... and he said to them...’ (Luke 4:14-30). And Matthew’s testimony could be taken as a summary of Christ’s public ministry throughout Israel: ‘Jesus went about... teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel’ (Matt. 4:23, NKJV). Of course, Christ healed the sick, restored the paralysed made the blind to see, and raised the dead. But *preaching* was his work, preaching the gospel – not preaching baptism, and certainly not baptising. Until the cross, and the fulfilment of the great purpose for which he came into the world – his death (Matt. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Pet. 3:18) – Christ was first and foremost a preacher. And as for baptism, as far as I can tell, he never baptised anyone; ‘Jesus himself did not baptise’ (John 4:2, NKJV), is all we are told about it. And yet, so the sacramentalists want us to believe, water baptism is the hinge upon which the personal experience of redemption turns!

The cumulative evidence is overwhelming: preaching, not baptism, is the means God uses to regenerate sinners, bring them to repentance and faith and so to salvation. Baptism has no part in this. Baptism, therefore, cannot be sacramental.

Please do not misunderstand me, however. Baptism is important – after faith. Every believer ought to be baptised – immersed – in obedience to the Lord Jesus. But baptism is only to be thought of after faith. And we know that faith comes after preaching:

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For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says: ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’... ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:10-14).

Of course, preaching in itself is not saving. Sinners are not saved merely by attendance at gospel preaching, or merely listening to a friend testifying about Christ, or by simply reading the Bible. I am not saying that these are not the way to hear the gospel and be saved. But something deeper and inward is required. Nothing less than the ‘ordinary’ equivalent of Mark 16:20 will do: ‘The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it’. Sinners need to be regenerated; they have to hear the gospel, repent and *believe* (Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:8-15). Looking back upon their conversion, believers can say: ‘Our salvation is nearer now than when we... *believed*’ (Rom. 13:11),<sup>6</sup> not – as a sacramentalist must say, or would like to say: ‘Our salvation is nearer now than when we... were baptised’.<sup>7</sup>

Let me develop this a little. Preaching and believing preceded baptism in the New Testament. And it was the believing that was all-important. Never do we read that believers were to look back upon their baptism as a source of comfort or challenge. Yet sacramentalists, having an inordinate view of baptism, regarding it as ‘the one thing needful’, are prone to press upon their hearers the memory of their baptism. I fully understand this: if water baptism is sacramental, then those who are baptised should be constantly driven back to the fact and memory of their baptism. Baptism is the all-important issue. Baptism accomplishes so much. Baptism

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<sup>6</sup> I have left out ‘*first believed*’ since ‘*first*’ is not in the Greek.

<sup>7</sup> In the Bible, the means of salvation is in the active – sinners repent and believe; but for the sacramentalist it is in the passive – ‘were baptised’. If anyone is tempted to dismiss this vital distinction as a man of straw, he should read my *Infant* and see how Reformed sacramentalists define conversion, draw assurance and seek to promote sanctification based on infant baptism – the infant, of course, of necessity being *passive*.

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should be the theme when addressing both sinners and saints. ‘Be baptised’ should be said to sinners, and ‘remember your baptism’ should be said to saints. So why does the New Testament never do this? This is so important a matter, let me digress to expand upon, and justify, my words.

### ***Excursus to draw attention to the excessive importance sacramentalists give to water baptism***

Although, in this excursus, I quote a Puritan – one who baptised infants – as typical of the excessive importance sacramentalists attach to baptism, it is only a question of time before the advocates of the recent rise of Baptist sacramentalism catch up. What follows illustrates the way in which sacramentalists encourage those who are tempted, fearful, lacking assurance, carnal or whatever to think about their baptism: ‘Remember your baptism’ seems to be their mantra.

Take Richard Sibbes: ‘There are many that are not book-learned, that cannot read; at least they have no leisure to read. I would they would read their book in their baptism; and if they would consider what it ministers to them upon all occasions, they would be better Christians than they are. Think of your baptism when you go to God, especially when he seems angry... It is the seal of your covenant; you have gone before me by your grace; you brought me into the covenant before I knew my right hand from my left. So when we go to church to offer our service to God, think, by baptism we were consecrated and dedicated to God. We not only receive grace from God, but we give ourselves to God. Therefore it is sacrilege for persons baptised to yield to temptations to sin. We are dedicated to God in baptism. When we are tempted to despair, let us think of our baptism. We are in the covenant of grace, and have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. The devil is an uncircumcised, damned, cursed spirit. He is out of the covenant. But I am in the covenant. Christ is mine; the Holy Ghost is mine; and God is mine. Therefore let us stand against all the temptations of that uncircumcised, unbaptised, damned spirit. The thinking of our baptism thus will help us to “resist the devil” (Jas. 4:7). He is a coward; if he is resisted, he will flee; and what will better resist him than the covenant of grace and the seal of it? When we are tempted to sin, let us think: What have I to do with sin? By baptism I have union with the death of Christ; he died to take away sin, and my end must be his. I must abolish sin in my flesh. Shall I yield to that which in baptism I have sworn against? And then if we be tempted to despair for sin, let us call to mind the promises of grace and forgiveness of sins, and the seal of forgiveness of sins, which is baptism. For as water in baptism washes the body, so the blood of

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Christ washes the soul. Let us make that use of our baptism, in temptations, not to despair for sin. And in conversing among men, let us labour to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3,5)... one baptism... They forget their baptism that are... in quarrels... And then for our children... let us make use of baptism. Do they die in their infancy? Make this use of it: I have assured hope that my child is gone to God. He was born in the covenant, and had the seal of the covenant, baptism; why should I doubt of the salvation of my child? If they live to years of discretion, then be of good comfort; he is God's child more than mine; I have dedicated him to God and to Christ, he was baptised in the name of Christ, Christ will care for him as well as for me. If I leave my children behind me, they are God's and Christ's children. They have received the seal of the covenant, baptism. Christ will provide for them. And he that provides heaven for them will provide all things in the way to heaven necessary. God has said: "I will be the God of you and of your children" (Ps. 132:12). They are in the covenant. Yours they were, Lord. A man may commit his children to God on his death bed... as before... by baptism. All this we have by thinking of our baptism'.<sup>8</sup>

Where is the Scripture for all this? This is my point. There is no Scripture for it.

Getting back to 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, as Gordon D.Fee, with consummate understatement, said: 'It seems clear from this passage that Paul does not understand baptism to effect salvation'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it does seem clear. But what an understatement.

Writing elsewhere, Fee got to grips with the passage:

Paul deliberately subordinates baptism to the proclamation of the gospel. This does not mean that he minimises baptism; what he will not allow is that it holds the same level of significance as the preaching of Christ... He specifically associates the reception of the Spirit with his proclamation of the gospel, not with baptism. In Paul's mind, baptism stands on a different level... as [a] response to [the] grace received through the Spirit's coming in connection with the hearing of faith at the time of proclamation. It is nearly unthinkable that Paul could speak so casually of baptism and of his having

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Sibbes: *Lydia's Conversion*, in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, Vol.6, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1983, pp530-531. See my *Infant* pp48-51, 150-154 for this and more such evidence.

<sup>9</sup> Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, p63.

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baptised only two of them (plus one household that he had to be reminded of!), if in fact he understood the Spirit to come at their baptism. [What is more,] in [1 Cor.] 2:1-5, he insists that the Spirit came on them precisely at the point of his ministry, through proclamation, which would hardly be true if it [the gift of the Spirit] came during baptism, since he baptised so few of them, one of whom he had actually forgotten about... One can scarcely imagine Paul to have argued the way he does in 1 Corinthians 1:13 – 2:5, if in fact the Spirit came on believers at baptism... [Take] Galatians 3:2-5... nothing in this text even remotely suggests that Paul presupposes this reception to have taken place at baptism; indeed, his argument loses its point if the reception of the Spirit were simply being transferred from one rite (circumcision) to another (baptism). This could perhaps look like an inconclusive argument from silence were it not for the several texts in which Paul ties his converts' reception of the Spirit directly to his own proclamation of the gospel. For Paul, the Spirit came in the context of his preaching and of their hearing the gospel (1 Thess. 1:5; Rom. 15:16,18-19). By his own admission, he rarely engaged in the actual baptising of converts. Thus, it seems scarcely possible that Paul himself understood the reception of the Spirit to be in response to their baptism in water. For him it would have been exactly the opposite... What... this evidence... suggest[s] is that the close tie of water baptism to the Spirit does not come from a close reading of Paul, but stems from reading back into Paul the later experience of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Fee was not quite strong enough here. 'It seems scarcely possible that Paul himself understood the reception of the Spirit to be in response to their baptism in water... What... this evidence... suggest[s]...'. Surely we can put it more dogmatically than that – and should put it more dogmatically. The passage utterly rules out the notion that water baptism conveys the Spirit. The evidence is incontrovertible.

Preaching, then, not baptism, was Paul's emphasis when, in the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 1:13-17, he said: 'God was pleased through the foolishness of what was *preached* to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon D.Fee: *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, 1994, pp862-863. 'The later experience of the church' – that is, the corruptions foisted on the church by Christendom.

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for wisdom’ – and, I cannot help observing, sacramentalists demand baptism – ‘but we *preach* Christ crucified’ (1 Cor. 1:21-23).

And this is not the only place. Paul forced the issue on the Galatians when he challenged them: ‘Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law’ – and I cannot help accommodating the text: ‘Did you receive the Spirit by baptism?’ – ‘or by believing what you heard?’ (Gal. 3:2). In all his instructions to Timothy and Titus – books so relevant for church practice – not once did the apostle mention baptism, but repeatedly referred to preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 1:3; 2:7; 3:2; 4:6,11,13,16; 5:1,17; 6:2-5,17; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2:2,14-15,25; 3:10,16; 4:2,17; Tit. 1:3,9,13; 2:1-10,12,15; 3:1,8-9; see also 1 Thess. 2, for instance).

When Christ said that ‘only one thing is needed’ (Luke 10:42), did he mean baptism? And when the Jews asked him: ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’, why did he reply: ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent’ (John 6:28-29)? Why didn’t he say: ‘The work of God is this: to be baptised’?

I repeat the sentiment already expressed: I am not for a minute suggesting that the apostle minimised baptism, but I am saying that sacramentalists give a place to water baptism, give an efficacy to water baptism, which is totally unwarranted by Scripture, an emphasis which flies in the face of 1 Corinthians 1:13-17. Whereas Paul maximises preaching, sacramentalists maximise baptism. But do not miss the difference. Paul is writing Scripture. If he maximises preaching, and sacramentalists do not, they must be distorting the apostolic model – and that must destroy their case.

Let me summarise: 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 is the only major passage in Paul’s letters which deals with water baptism as far as it concerns the subject in hand. As such, it must play a very important role – indeed, the all-important role – in determining how we view the ordinance. From this passage, it is quite clear that preaching – not baptism – is that which God has established as the means of calling sinners to Christ. A huge, unbridgeable chasm yawns between Paul and the sacramentalists here. Sacramentalism is bound to reverse the roles of preaching and baptism. It is logically bound to reverse their order. But the reversal of the

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priority – let alone the order – of preaching and baptism is fatal to sacramentalism in that it so plainly contradicts the apostle in this passage. Baptism, therefore, whatever else it is, cannot be sacramental. The sacramentalists must be wrong. 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 is conclusive. It is, indeed, the clinching passage.<sup>11</sup> In Romans 6:3-4, therefore, Paul; cannot be talking of water baptism as a sacrament.

If, despite this fact, sacramentalists have their way and sacramentalism gets a hold, then baptism must be in the driving seat. That being so, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> promiscuous baptism – even going the whole hog and practising promiscuous infant-baptism, and at the earliest possible opportunity for the baby – must inevitably follow. And this will produce a huge number of unregenerate men and women who think that because they were sprinkled as a baby they have their sins washed away and are the children of God. The disaster will be eternal.

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<sup>11</sup> For more, with regard to Baptist sacramentalists, see my *Baptist* pp205-215.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Baptist; Infant*.