

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

JOHN THE BAPTIST: GOD'S BULLDOZER

The English words 'baptize', 'baptism' and 'baptist' are derived from a word in the original Greek version of the New Testament; the Greek verb 'bapto'. 'Bapto' means to dip, immerse or submerge something in water or some other liquid. In the New Testament, 'bapto' is used to convey the idea of 'washing' or 'cleansing'.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, BAPTISM = WASHING

Prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, God sent a man to prepare the world for Jesus' message. That man was 'John the Baptist' (or 'John the Baptizer'). John was known for instructing people to turn away from their sins (repent), and to then be immersed (baptized) in water as a symbol of God washing away both the guilt and power of sin in their lives. John's ministry was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, 700 years before John's birth:

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!' Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low. And the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

Luke 3:4-6, Isaiah 40:3-5 (Matthew 3:3, Mark 1:3, John 1:23)

John the Baptist has rightly been called 'God's bulldozer'; because God used him to level the world spiritually. God used John to flatten spiritual mountains and fill spiritual valleys; so that people would be able to see and come to God easily.



JOHN THE BAPTIST, GOD'S BULLDOZER

John revealed God's 'simple, straight and level road' to salvation. John showed the world that God would save people by washing them.

John's work continues to this present day. The message of John the Baptist lies at the very beginning of all four of the Christian gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. John's work is foundational for an understanding how Jesus Christ saves people; and it is just as important for people today as it was for the people of Israel over 1900 years ago.

FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW

John the Baptist was a Jew, born into the priestly tribe of Levi. His father (Zacharias) was a priest, and was burning incense in the Temple in Jerusalem when an angel told him that he and his wife (Elizabeth) would miraculously have a son in their old age (Luke 1). The angel told Zacharias that his son would be named John, and...

...he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. And he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah; to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Luke 1:15-17

Jesus Himself confirmed the greatness of John:

Truly I say unto you, among them that are born of women there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Matthew 11:11

Although he was trained from his youth as a priest in the line of Aaron, John would not serve in the Temple. As the last and greatest of the Old Testament priests, John the Baptist's job would be to help Israel move from the symbolism of the Old Testament, to the fulfillment of that symbolism by Jesus Christ. John's dedication to this mission is seen in his description of the Lord Jesus as God's true Passover Lamb:

The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and said "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world". John 1:29

There is a simple reason why John was respected and accepted by the Jewish people. They were very concerned about cleanliness; both physical and spiritual. They had received a number of Old Testament laws requiring strict cleansing (Leviticus 11-15).

The priests had to wash carefully before serving in the Temple. Anything exposed to leprosy had to be washed. If a person touched any dead thing, they were required to be made clean before approaching God. If people had sexual intercourse, or if a woman was menstruating or had given birth to a child, certain rituals of cleansing had

to be followed. Depending on the circumstances clothes, furniture, and even houses had to be washed if they had been contaminated.

For the Jewish people cleanliness was 'next to godliness'. In the light of this religious emphasis, it is not surprising that the Jewish people responded immediately to John. The fact that the son of a priest was calling people to repent, and to be washed in the Jordan river, made perfect sense to them. They understood that sin makes a person unclean before God. And so they came to John to confess their sins and have them washed away.

John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the Old Testament Levitical priests, condensed all of the Old Testament animal sacrifices and ceremonial laws into one simple symbolic ritual; going underneath water, and then coming back up out of the water.

SEEING GOD'S SALVATION

As Luke wrote, John the Baptist was sent to reveal the way of God's salvation:

And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Luke 3:6

In John's baptism we see three basic steps:

1) REPENTANCE AND FAITH: We must be willing to repent (re-think) about our sins and rebellion against God. John called for people to judge themselves, and to confess their sins openly.

Repentance and faith always go hand-in-hand. This is because when we agree with God about the nature of sin (that it deserves death), then our eyes are simultaneously opened to our need; that the penalty and power of sin in our lives be 'washed away'. And so sincere repentance in John's day was followed by people believing in his message, and coming to him to be washed and find acceptance with God.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psalm 51:17

He that covers his sins shall not prosper. But whosoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy. Proverbs 28:13

2) WASHING: John plunged people underneath the water of the Jordan River, and then brought them up again. This was symbolic of death, burial and resurrection. This is how God deals with sin; by putting the sinner to death, and then raising him up from the dead to begin a new life. This is the meaning of baptism in the New Testament:

Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death. That like as

Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3

3) RIGHTEOUSNESS After John's 'washing', a person was expected to live a righteous life. God saves people from sin, to righteousness. John talked about the 'fruits' of repentance, and warned people not to deceive themselves:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, John said unto them "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits consistent with repentance. And think not to say within yourselves 'We have Abraham as our father'. For I say unto you that God is able of these stoness to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire". Matthew 3:7-10

Jesus also spoke about trees and their 'fruit':

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit. But a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. Matthew 7:15-19

SYMBOLISM vs. REALITY

John made it clear that his baptism, which was commanded by God, was only symbolic. People would need a real washing by the One who would be coming after him; Jesus Christ.

John declared that the Lord Jesus would cleanse the entire world. He would cleanse repentant sinners through the Holy Spirit, making them capable of serving and pleasing God; and He would cleanse the rest of world with fire:

And as the people were in expectation, and all men thought in their hearts about John (whether he was the Christ or not), John answered saying unto them all "I indeed baptize you with water. But One mightier than I comes, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose. He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His (threshing) floor, and will gather the wheat into His barn. But the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire". Luke 3:15-17

The prophet Malachi also foretold the coming of John the Baptist, and the 'purifying power' of the 'Lord' who would come after John:

Behold, I will send my messenger (John the Baptist), and he shall prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple; even the Messenger of the Covenant Whom you delight in. "Behold, He shall come" says the Lord of hosts.

But who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. And He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Malachi 3:1-3

BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

So what is this 'washing' or 'baptism' that is performed through the Holy Spirit? It is the Spirit's uniting of a person with the Lord Jesus in His own death, burial and resurrection from the dead. God does not save people by avoiding justice, but by carrying it out. God washes away the penalty and the power of sin in a person's life by putting that person to death with Christ, burying him with Christ, and then raising him from the dead with Christ to begin a new life:

For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

This washing away of sin through union with Christ is also referred to in the New Testament as being 'born again', and as 'regeneration'. What is the nature of this union between the sinner and Christ? It is a 'Trinitarian Union'. It is like the union between the three Persons of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as these three Persons are one God, so also many persons are united within one Man, Jesus Christ:

Yet a little while, and the world will see Me no more. But you will see Me. Because I live, you shall live also. At that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you. John 14:19-20

That they all may be one; as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. That they also may be one in Us. That the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given to them; that they may be one, even as We are One. I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in One. And that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

John 17:21-23

When a person is 'born again' in Christ, he becomes acceptable to God; because the old person has been destroyed, and a new person now stands before Him. Through union with the Lord Jesus, Who Himself is the 'firstborn from the dead', the sinner is also 'born from the dead' to begin a new life:

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia. Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come (the Father), and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne (the Holy Spirit), and from Jesus Christ; the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. Revelation 1:4-5

JESUS' BAPTISM: GOD'S ORDER OF SALVATION

The complete 'picture' of how God saves people is seen in Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (John 3:3,7). When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John tried to prevent it:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. But John forbade Him, saying "I have need to be baptized by You, and You are coming to me?" And Jesus answering said unto him "Allow it to be so now. For thus it becomes us to fulfill all righteousness". Then John allowed Him. Matthew 3:13-15

Jesus submitted to John's baptism for two reasons. **First**, Jesus was identifying Himself with sinful mankind, acknowledging that He would have to die and be raised from the dead in order for us to die and be resurrected in Him. **Secondly**, Jesus was revealing God's 'Order of Salvation' (Latin 'Ordo Salutis') to the world:

And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water. And, behold, the heavens were opened unto Him, and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and landing upon Him. And behold, a voice from heaven said "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased". Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 3:16-4:1

In Jesus' baptism we are shown more than the three basic steps of John's ritual. In Jesus' experience we see God's complete order of salvation, consisting of five steps:

1) Repentance and Faith First, a person must come to God confessing his sins and acknowledging his need to be 'washed' by the shed blood of Christ. When a sinner condemns himself, and believes the truth about his sins and about what Jesus has done about those sins, God recognizes this repentance and faith for what it is; an inward righteousness of the heart. It is full agreement with God about sin, and thus also about the only possible remedy for sin; the cross of Christ:

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us. And made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Acts 15:8-9

That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture says "Whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed."
Romans 10:9-11

2) Regeneration (or the new birth) Though the repentant sinner is righteous in his heart, he still stands condemned by the Law because He still has two problems; his sinful actions must be punished, and his Sin-owned body must be destroyed. Both of these requirements are met as the Holy Spirit unites the repentant sinner with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

3) Reception of the Holy Spirit When He came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit entering a person after they have received a new 'resurrection body'.

The Holy Spirit cannot inhabit a body owned by the spirit of Sin. The sinner's body must be destroyed (along with Sin within it), and a new body must be raised from the dead before the Holy Spirit can then inhabit that body.

It is here that we see the two roles that the Holy Spirit fulfills in salvation; 1) washing a person through death with Christ, and then 2) entering the person's body to share God's divine nature with him.

Jesus answered "Truly, truly I say unto you, except a man be born of water (the 'washing of regeneration') and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God".
John 3:5

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin. He condemned (destroyed) Sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.
Titus 3:4-5

4) Justification After His baptism and reception of the Spirit, God the Father declared that Jesus was His beloved Son, and fully pleasing to Him.

When a person is born again in Christ, this same thing happens. The Father declares that the person is now His beloved child, and is fully pleasing to Him. This is called 'justification'. It is a declaration by God, based upon facts, that the person is free from both the penalty and power of sin; and is now fulfilling the Law through faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba, Father". The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. Romans 8:14-16

5) The Trial of Faith Lastly, Jesus was immediately directed by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness; for the testing of His obedience to God. So also the new Christian begins a 'wilderness journey' in which his perseverance in obedient faith will be tested (see The Necessity of Christian Perseverance).

God will render to every man according to his deeds. To those who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life. Romans 2:6-7

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:7

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience (perseverance). But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4

To him who overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne. Even as I also overcame, and have sat down with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21

THREE OLD TESTAMENT PICTURES OF BAPTISM

Baptism has three great precedents in the Old Testament, where people were saved by passing through water: Noah's flood (Genesis 6:8-9:29), the passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea (Exodus 14), and Jonah's three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish (the book of Jonah). Each of these stories depict deliverance through death in Christ.

Jesus likened His own death and resurrection to Jonah's experience. Paul identified Christians with the Hebrews who passed through the Red Sea. And Peter compared the new birth to the deliverance of Noah:

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying "Master, we would see a sign from You". But He answered and said unto them "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. And no sign shall be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matthew 12:38-40

Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:20-21

Jesus is the Christian's ark that carries him through the waters of God's judgment. He is the Christian's 'Moses', who leads him through the Red Sea to deliverance. And it is through union with Jesus, in His 'Jonah experience' of three days and nights in the tomb, that the Christian begins a new life.

SO WHY BAPTIZE WITH WATER?

A reasonable question to ask at this point might be 'Why did Jesus instruct the apostles to continue baptizing people with water?

Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

If water-baptism is powerless and cannot save, and might even cause confusion about what truly does save, then why should John's Old Testament symbolism still have a place in the New Testament? There are three reasons why Jesus commanded Christians to be water-baptized:

1) **First** of all, baptism is a powerful teaching tool. It shows both the new Christian, and the entire world how people are saved. This is because it is a visible picture of an invisible reality; that sinners are washed from the penalty and power of sin through union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

2) **Secondly**, Jesus instructed that Christians were to be baptized in the name of the Trinity, and thus to be instructed regarding Who the Trinity is:

Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

An acknowledgement of the Trinity is essential to the Christian faith; primarily because it is the truth about Who God is.

But in addition, an understanding of the Trinity is essential for understanding how all mankind sinned in Adam, and how people can be saved through the 'last Adam'; the Lord Jesus. The explanation lies in our 'Trinitarian Union' with Adam, and the

possibility of a 'Trinitarian Union' with Christ. Water baptism symbolizes this Trinitarian union. And so it is impossible to understand baptism if we do not understand the Trinitarian union or 'oneness' that it portrays.

Some people have raised questions about whether or not Jesus' command, that people be baptized in the names of the Father, Son and Spirit, is found in the earliest original versions of the Bible.

We know that it is because, when Paul met some disciples in Ephesus, he asked them whether or not they had received the Holy Spirit. They said that they hadn't even heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul immediately asked them what kind of baptism they had received, because he knew that if they had received the baptism that Jesus had commanded, they would have been taught about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-5) For a further discussion on the nature of God, see **God is a Family Called the Trinity**.

3) Thirdly, the Bible tells us that a public declaration of our faith in Christ is essential for salvation, and is a proof of the genuineness of our faith:

That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture says "Whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed".
Romans 10:9-11

But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father Who is in heaven. **Matthew 10:33**

If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we believe not, yet He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself. **2 Timothy 2:12-13**

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful. **Hebrews 10:23**

I know your works, and where you dwell, even where Satan's seat is: and you hold fast My name, and have not denied My faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was My faithful martyr; who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. **Revelation 2:13**

For many new Christians, water-baptism may be their first opportunity to openly profess their faith in Christ. And so by being baptized with water while confessing their faith, they are obeying two commandments of the Lord.

But it must be remembered that there have been many people down through the history of Christianity, who for various reasons have not been able to be baptized with water. But they have not been prevented from openly confessing their faith in Christ. Baptism is one way of confessing faith, but it is not the only way.

CHRISTIANITY'S SECOND RITUAL: COMMUNION

There is a second symbolic ritual that Jesus commanded Christians to observe, in remembrance of His death:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said "Take, eat. This is My body, which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of Me". After the same manner also He took the cup when he had eaten, saying "This cup is the new testament in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death until He comes. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:23-27

Just as John's baptism had its roots in the 'washings' that were performed in Old Testament times, so also eating the bread and grape juice of communion has an example in the Old Testament. When Melchizedek (the King and Priest of Salem) met Abraham, he brought bread and wine as they worshiped God together:

And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine. He was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed Abram, and said "Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be the most high God, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand". Genesis 14:18-20

It is interesting to observe that, although bread and wine was central to Melchizedek's worship of God, this combination is not prominent in the Mosaic Levitical laws. But the Lord Jesus, Whose 'new covenant' would replace the Mosaic rituals, and Whose priesthood would be everlasting like that of Melchizedek, once again made bread and wine a centerpiece in the worship of God:

And being made perfect, Jesus became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him; called by God as a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 5:9-10

How does eating bread or drinking grape juice symbolize union with Christ? Because when we eat food, it enters into every living cell within our bodies. We are united and become 'one' with the food that we eat; and we receive life as a result of this union. In a similar way, oneness with Christ gives us life. This is why the Lord Jesus likened union with Himself to eating food and drinking a beverage:

And Jesus said unto them "I am the bread of life. He that comes to Me shall never hunger. And he that believes on Me shall never thirst. John 6:35

The Jews therefore argued among themselves, saying "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said unto them "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except you eat

the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whosoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life. And I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eats My flesh, and drinks My blood, dwells in Me and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eats Me, even he shall live by Me. John 6:52-57

The Christian's oneness with Christ is the 'Trinitarian Union' that I have explained above. Baptism and communion are symbolic of that union. Mindful that these two rituals would symbolize His union with His people, Jesus described His approaching death as both a 'baptism' and a 'cup'. When two disciples, James and John, requested high privileges in His future kingdom, Jesus gave this response:

"You know not what you ask. Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said unto Him "We are able". Matthew 20:22

Jesus responded by saying that James and John would indeed share in the baptism and cup of death that He was about to endure:

And He said unto them "You shall indeed drink of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with. But to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give. It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared by My Father".
Matthew 20:23

Sharing in Jesus' 'cup' and 'baptism' is not unique to James and John. It is true of all born-again Christians. Everyone who repents of their sins and has been born again has been united with Christ in the 'cup' and 'baptism' of His death, burial and resurrection. The apostle Paul referred to this in his letter to the Corinthians:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.
1 Corinthians 12:13

CHRISTIANITY'S THIRD RITUAL: THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

In the book of Hebrews we are given six basic issues that are described as 'the principles of Christ'. I believe that these are actually three pairs of principles, each 'pair' being closely linked together:

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection (maturity); not laying again the foundation of...

- 1) Repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.
- 2) The doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands.
- 3) Of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. Hebrews 6:1-2

It is obvious that repentance from the dead 'works of the Law', and the alternative of faith in God, represent an important pairing in the Bible. It is also certain that the resurrection of the dead to be eternally judged by God are closely associated events. But what is the connection between baptism and the laying on of hands?

The first and most obvious connection begins in the Old Testament, where people laid their hands upon the head of an animal, before sacrificing it as an atonement for their sins:

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel; and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat. And he shall send it away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. Leviticus 16:21 (1:4, 3:2,8,13 4:4,24,29,33)

In the Old Testament, laying one's hands upon a sacrificial animal symbolized unity with that animal in its death. And baptism serves the same purpose in the New Testament; symbolizing union with Christ in His death. In my opinion, this correspondence alone is sufficient to explain the connecting of baptism with the laying on of hands by the author of Hebrews.

But a second connection, between baptism and the laying on of hands, is seen on three occasions in the New Testament. Through the laying on of the hands of Peter, through the hands of Ananias, and through the hands of Paul people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Some Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit after Peter and John had laid their hands upon them (Acts 8:17). Paul received the Holy Spirit after Ananias had laid his hands upon him in Damascus (Acts 9:12,17). And when Paul laid his hands upon some believers in Ephesus, they also received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). What are we to make of this?

It must be noted that these three events are the only occasions where the baptism of the Spirit through the laying on of hands is recorded. It was not the 'normal' way that people experienced the baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament. And so I would argue that, apart from the obvious parallel between placing hands upon a sacrificial animal in the Old Testament, and being baptized in the New Testament, there is only one meaning and purpose for the laying on of hands in the New Testament; God validating His servants and their message.

We see this Divine declaration of authority in the Old Testament, when Moses was instructed to lay his hands upon Joshua; appointing him to undertake the leadership of Israel (Numbers 27:18,23). The laying on of Moses' hands did not bestow the Holy Spirit upon Joshua. Joshua is described as already possessing the Holy Spirit. Rather, it was an inauguration to an 'office' in Israel, and a validation of Joshua before the people of Israel.

With this idea of Divine validation in mind, it is possible to see the New Testament laying on of hands in a different way. In the case of the Samaritans, their reception of the Holy Spirit through the apostles' hands showed them that their source of spiritual leadership and authority would be found in the apostles in Jerusalem. In the case of Paul at Ephesus, the fact that the Spirit was given through his hands confirmed his apostleship and leadership to those believers.

And I believe that the 'laying on' of Ananias' hands upon Paul was meant to show the fearful and doubtful Christians in Damascus that God truly was working in Paul's life. Because Ananias was trusted and respected among the Christians in Damascus, the laying of his hands upon Paul, and Paul's immediate reception of sight showed the Christians of Damascus that this 'destroyer of the church' had indeed been turned into an apostle of God.

There are many examples in the New Testament where the laying on of someone's hands displayed miraculous power. In none of these cases did it bestow the Holy Spirit. Rather, this exercise of power was used to validate the message of the person exercising that power. Jesus laid His hands upon many people and healed them. Such miracles confirmed the validity of His mission and message. They fall under the Biblical heading of 'signs and wonders':

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will? Hebrews 2:3-4

Validation is the central purpose the laying on of hands in the New Testament. Christians laid their hands upon the seven deacons that were chosen to serve the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:6). Christians at Antioch laid their hands upon Barnabas and Paul before they departed on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:3). And Paul warned Timothy about the moral hazard of laying hands upon someone too quickly:

Lay hands quickly on no man. Neither be a partaker of other men's sins. Keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:22

The 'laying on of hands' is an ancient concept that still holds an important place in the Christian church today. It is used in the ordination of church leaders. And it is used when people pray over someone for God's help, blessing or healing. The importance of human touch within the body of Christ should not be underestimated. But it should not be used carelessly or unscripturally.

Like baptism and communion, I believe that the laying on of hands is symbolic. But this symbolism has importance. And just as the disrespectful use of baptism and communion can constitute sin in the sight of God, so also a misuse of the laying on of hands can lead to condemnation as well.

BAPTISM ERROR #1: SACRAMENTALISM

Sacramentalism is the belief that the Christian sacraments (water-baptism, communion and the laying on of hands) contain spiritual power within themselves, and are able impact people's lives and eternal destinies. There are three basic reasons why people attribute power to the sacraments:

1) MISUNDERSTANDING The first source of sacramentalism comes from a misunderstanding of Peter's message on the day of Pentecost:

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said unto them "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:37-38

Many have assumed that the baptism that Peter was referring to was baptism with water. There is no reason to believe this. The entire nation of Israel had been completely saturated with the message of John the Baptist; that his water-baptism was merely symbolic, and only a foreshadowing of the real baptism that the coming Messiah would achieve through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself had told His disciples that John's words would be fulfilled at Pentecost:

And while staying with them Jesus ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which, he said, "You heard from Me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now". Acts 1:4-5

And so Peter and the other disciples, along with all of their fellow Jews who heard his message that day, understood that Peter was talking about a real baptism; being baptized by the Holy Spirit. To consider anything else is to ignore the ministry of John the Baptist; the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah, filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, and one of the greatest men to ever live.

John the Baptist's message was still ringing in the ears of every Jew on the day of Pentecost, when Peter told them to repent and be baptized. They knew that water-baptism could not save them. Their forefathers had been washing themselves for 1500 years under the laws of Moses, and it had done little good. They knew that John had been pointing them to a true cleansing, and that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, which they had now witnessed, was the result of that true cleansing.

At Pentecost there was no confusion in any mind about the difference between symbolism and reality. Every convert did the most important things first. They repented of their sins. They believed in and called upon Christ to save them. They were cleansed through regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and then indwelt by the Holy

Spirit. Finally, lastly they were baptized in water as a symbol of what had already happened to each one of them.

Another misunderstanding of the Bible needs to be mentioned here. Some have misunderstood a phrase that Paul used, where he talked about being 'baptized for the dead'; thinking that somehow living people can be baptized on behalf of those who have already died.

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? 1 Corinthians 15:29

In using the phrase 'baptized for the dead', Paul was referring to the fact that water baptism symbolizes death with Christ. He was simply referring to a truth that he and the other apostles all taught; that all Christians have died with Christ, and that water baptism symbolizes this death (Romans 6:3, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 1 Peter 2:24, 4:1-2).

2) LEGALISM Because Jesus commanded that Christians be baptized with water, some have argued that a failure to be baptized with water might constitute a disobedience that can put a person outside of the grace of God:

Go therefore and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

Although they acknowledge that water-baptism is symbolic, at the same time these people insist that water-baptism is necessary. This is a 'backdoor', legalistic way of turning water-baptism into a saving sacrament. It fails to acknowledge that water-baptism is a gift; not something meant to enslave us.

When Jesus healed people on the sabbath, he was accused of breaking God's Law, because He was 'working' on the sabbath. Jesus' response was...

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath”. Mark 2:27

Most people, when they are born again, are filled with so much joy that they cannot wait to follow the Lord's command and be baptized with water. But throughout history there have also been people who, for various reasons, have not been able to be baptized with water after their conversion. This has never disqualified them for eternal life, because the real baptism has already happened to them.

But legalists would turn this sacrament, which symbolizes God's great grace and generosity, into a burden that can nullify God's grace. Such people need to be careful, lest their condemnation of the unbaptized define themselves as people outside of God's grace:

But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the innocent. Matthew 12:7, Hosea 6:6

The apostle Paul wrote about the relative unimportance of water-baptism:

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. Not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 1 Corinthians 1:17

3) HYPOCRISY Some people want to pretend that they are Christians. They want to perform the outward rituals without genuinely repenting in their hearts, and living righteous lives. John the Baptist warned people about this:

Then John the Baptist said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Luke 3:7-9

As a result of such hypocrisy, Christian denominations have arisen which teach that water-baptism confers God's favor, and makes a person a Christian. God warns about the distinction between outward appearances, and inward realities:

You hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying "This people draws near unto Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines (sacramentalism) the commandments of men". Matthew 15:7-9, Isaiah 29:13

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves; covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. They will have a form (appearance) of godliness, but deny the power of God. From such turn away. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

BAPTISM ERROR #2: PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism is the belief that the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' is not the 'new birth', but is a second experience of the Holy Spirit that a Christian can have after he has been born again and has already received the Spirit.

Pentecostalism is based upon the experience of Christ's disciples; who first received the Holy Spirit from Jesus on the day of His resurrection, but were then baptized by the Holy Spirit seven weeks later on the day of Pentecost:

Then the same day at evening (being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews) Jesus came and stood in their midst. And He said unto them "Peace be unto you". And when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad, when they saw the Lord.

Then Jesus said to them again "Peace be unto you. As My Father has sent Me, even so send I you". And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them "Receive the Holy Spirit". John 20:19-22

Since Jesus' disciples were not baptized by the Holy Spirit until the day of Pentecost, 50 days later (the word 'pentecost' means 50), Pentecostals believe that a two-stage reception of the Holy Spirit is the 'normal Christian experience'. They believe that every Christian receives the Holy Spirit when they are converted, but that being baptized by the Spirit is a 'secondary possibility' at some later point.

Before discussing Pentecostalism further, it is important to distinguish it from the 'Charismatic movement', because they represent two completely different issues. A Charismatic Christian is one who believes that the supernatural spiritual gifts are still present in the church; such as speaking in tongues, healing and performing other miracles (the Greek word for 'gift' is 'charismata', hence the name Charismatic).

It is true that most Pentecostals are also Charismatic; most of them believe that the Baptism of the Spirit will manifest itself in miraculous signs like speaking in tongues. But not all Pentecostals are Charismatic.

There are some Pentecostals (very few) who believe that the Baptism of the Spirit is simply a deeper filling by the Holy Spirit; one that follows a 'crisis' experience in a Christian's life. It might happen as a 'trial of faith', or at a point where a person is called by God to a deeper commitment; possibly to a particular ministry. But these Pentecostal Christians do not believe that the baptism of the Spirit is accompanied by the charismatic gifts.

At the same time there are Charismatic Christians who are not 'Pentecostal'. The Charismatic movement gained much of its momentum in the 1970's as people left non-Pentecostal traditions (coming from Catholicism or mainline Protestant backgrounds) in a pursuit of the 'spiritual gifts'. I am not trying to 'divide and conquer' here; pitting Pentecostals and Charismatics against each other. I am simply trying to clarify the question by defining Pentecostalism accurately. Pentecostalism is distinguished by one thing; its understanding of the Day of Pentecost.

The error of Pentecostalism lies in not understanding the Feast of Pentecost (Leviticus 23). Just as Passover symbolized the death of Christ for centuries, as God's true 'Passover Lamb', so also the Feast of Pentecost symbolized something important for many centuries; the birth of the Church through its direct connection with

Passover. Jesus' resurrection, on a Sunday morning, was followed exactly seven weeks later by the new birth of His Church through Him. The regeneration of Christ's disciples and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit happened for the first time on that day.

Just as the Lord Jesus fulfilled Passover by dying on that very day, so also the disciples fulfilled Pentecost on the very day as well. This is why the disciples, uniquely in the New Testament, although already possessing the Holy Spirit, had to wait seven weeks before being baptized by the Spirit.

There is not another example in the New Testament, apart from Pentecost, of any person who possessed the Holy Spirit without being baptized by the Spirit.

Nor is there any instruction in the gospels, the book of Acts or the epistles that tells any Christian that, after receiving the Holy Spirit, they should go on to be baptized by the Spirit. Apart from the experience of the disciples at Pentecost, a two-stage experience of the Holy Spirit is completely absent from the New Testament.

I would suggest that the difference between the disciples' reception of the Spirit when Christ breathed upon them, and their reception of the Spirit 7 weeks later at Pentecost, might be seen in these words of Jesus:

Even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him. But you know Him, for He dwells with you, and shall be in you.
John 14:17

What a Pentecostal Christian might choose to think about the gifts of the Spirit is one thing. But Pentecostals need to repent concerning their mishandling of the baptism of the Spirit. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is experienced by every genuine Christian, and marks the beginning of the true Christian experience:

For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
1 Corinthians 12:13

One of the side effects of Pentecostalism has been the entrance of many people into the professing church who have not been truly born again. They make a 'decision', walk down an aisle, pray a prayer and attend a church; but they have no spiritual life. Such people are often sincerely searching and well-meaning.

Sometimes they are assured that they are Christians, but have not experienced the 'baptism of the Spirit' yet. And so they are encouraged to seek this 'second experience' of the 'Christian life'. And because they are told that this 'higher fullness' will be accompanied by speaking in tongues and other 'signs', they are eager to experience and display these 'gifts'. But this entire theological 'pyramid' is built upon a false understanding of Pentecost, and of true Christian conversion.

A similar two-stage perception of Christianity is seen in non-Charismatic churches as well. But instead of telling false converts that they lack the baptism of the Spirit, these converts are told that they are 'carnal Christians'. They might be told that they are 'babes' who need to 'grow in grace' and become 'spiritual Christians'. Or they might be told that they are being held back by not putting certain sins out of their lives.

In both churches, whether Pentecostal or not, false converts are encouraged to believe that they are genuine Christians, while Biblical truth about the baptism of the Spirit, and true experiential conversion, is neglected.

BAPTISM ERROR #3: CALVINISTIC REGENERATION

In the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have a clear revelation of God's 'Order of Salvation'. That 'order' is comprised of the following steps:

- 1) **Repentance** about sin, and coming by faith to the 'Baptizer'.
- 2) **Regeneration** unto new life; through death, burial and resurrection from the dead.
- 3) **Reception of the Holy Spirit**, enabling a person to fulfill the Law through 'the fruits of the Spirit'.
- 4) **Justification**; a declaration by God that the 'new person' standing before Him, now possessing the Holy Spirit, is His own child and fully pleasing to Him.
- 5) **A life of trials** 'in the wilderness', requiring ongoing obedience to the will of God.

The error of Reformed, Calvinistic theology is that it denies this 'order' that we find above. Calvinists teach that regeneration precedes repentance and faith. They teach that non-Christians are 'spiritually dead', and must be regenerated by God and given spiritual life before they can repent and believe the Gospel.

How has Calvinism come to believe that non-Christians are 'dead'? One of the 'proof texts' that they use is found in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus:

And you God made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. Ephesians 2:1

Calvinists claim that this verse is a description of non-Christians in general; that they are spiritually 'dead' in their trespasses and sins. And Calvinists also conclude from this verse that non-Christians cannot repent and believe the Gospel unless their 'sovereign God' chooses to regenerate them and give them spiritual life first; so that they can afterward repent and believe the Gospel.

What Calvinists fail to see, however, is the fact that in this verse Paul was describing a specific point within the regeneration process. It is the point where the sinner is 'dead in his trespasses and sins' because he has been crucified with Christ. This point is symbolized in water-baptism when the person is underneath the water. He is 'resurrected' from being 'dead in his trespasses and sins', to be 'made alive' in Christ.

That this is the correct explanation of Ephesians 2:1, is seen in what Paul wrote to these Ephesians a few verses later, and also in what he wrote to the church in Colosse:

But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-6

In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God; Who has raised Him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way; nauling it to His cross. Colossians 2:11-14

Regeneration and the reception of the Holy Spirit follow repentance and faith:

In whom (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. In Whom also after you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Ephesians 1:13

Although unregenerate people live in bodies that are owned, indwelt and dominated by Sin, and are thus incapable of obeying God's Law, this does not mean that they are 'dead'. Nor does the fact that they do not possess the Holy Spirit mean that they are 'dead'. They are not. They are very much alive. Their minds are very sensitive to spiritual things, and they are capable of wrestling with the issues of life and the word of God. To claim that they are dead is a terrible falsehood.

Being dead in our trespasses and sins is a step in regeneration; our death. In failing to see this, Calvinists have flunked 'Christianity 101' and have trampled upon one of the most glorious truths in the history of the universe. It is the truth that God saves people in Christ Jesus by putting them to death 'in their trespasses and sins', before resurrecting them to a new life:

And you who were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death. To present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight; if you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel. Colossians 1:21-23

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death. That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be

also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him. Romans 6:4-9

Calvinists teach these errors because they obsess over 'the sovereignty of God'. They emphasize God's choices to the effective exclusion of human choice. For them sin is imputed, not real. Righteousness is also imputed, and not real. And so Calvinists define repentance, faith and regeneration in terms of God's choices as well.

In majoring upon the Father's sovereign activity which they cannot see, while ignoring the moral world that they can see, Calvinists have chosen to deal in the worthless, 'counterfeit paper currency' of God's sovereignty, while God Himself does business with us in the 'hard gold currency' of truth, righteousness and justice. I discuss the fundamental errors of Reformed Theology in my web page titled [Navigating Predestination and Freedom of Choice](#).

And while it is true, as Jesus said, that no one can come unto Him unless the Father draws him (John 6:44-45), this does not justify a denial of mankind's moral freedom of choice and responsibility. Nor does it justify subverting God's word by confusing the Father's 'drawing' with regeneration.

Calvinists hinder Christian evangelism by denying that the Christian's obedient choice to proclaim the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), and the sinner's obedient choice to repent and believe the Gospel (Matthew 4:17), define Biblical evangelism.

Instead Calvinists declare to both the Church and to sinners that whether or not people are saved is not the result of our choices, but of God's choices. A more deadly 'wet blanket' upon the missionary activity of the Holy Spirit cannot be imagined. In saying these things, Calvinists are using God's sovereign 'hardness' as an excuse for burying their 'spiritual talents' in the ground:

Then he who had received the one talent came and said "Lord, I knew that You are a hard Man; reaping where You have not sown, and gathering where You have not labored. And I was afraid, and went and hid Your talent in the earth. Here, You have what is Yours". His Lord answered and said unto him "You wicked and lazy servant. You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not labored. You ought therefore to have put My money to the exchangers. And then at My coming I would have received My own with interest.

Therefore take the talent from him, and give it unto him who has ten talents. For unto every one who has shall more be given; and he shall have abundance. But from him that has nothing shall be taken away even what he has left. And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:24-30

Calvinists will answer for this, and for their many other perversions of the dual truths of the sovereignty of God and the moral freedom of man. In their self-blinded insistence that non-Christians are spiritually 'dead', it is the Calvinists themselves who have become dead:

These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear; serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds. Late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots. Raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame. Wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. Jude 12-13

Calvinists use other scriptures to redefine regeneration as well. One of them is from John chapter 3:

Jesus answered and said unto Nicodemus "Truly, truly I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". John 3:3

The Calvinist points to this verse, and asks 'How can a person believe in the kingdom of God, if he cannot see it? Therefore a person must be born again before he can believe and be saved'. But this is not what Jesus meant.

Jesus was saying that we must be born of the Spirit in order to be spiritually discerning; to see God's kingdom through 'spiritual eyes' and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained what He meant:

Marvel not that I said unto you 'You must be born again'. The wind blows where it wills. And you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from where it comes, and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. John 3:7-8

In this same conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus made God's order of salvation unmistakably clear. He likened salvation through Himself, to the deliverance of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:14-15, Numbers 21:4-9

In the wilderness the Israelites rebelled against God, and God sent poisonous serpents into their midst. As they were bitten by these serpents, and many people began to die, Moses came to God for help. And God instructed him to put a bronze serpent upon a pole; with the promise that whoever looked at it would live. That bronze serpent was a prophetic picture of Christ being 'made sin' for us upon the cross.

And so it was, though people were powerless as they felt the poisonous venom destroying their bodies, that if they only looked to the bronze serpent, their bodies were immediately healed and they were restored to life. This is a picture of salvation through Christ. Calvinists insist that a person must live before he can look. But Jesus says 'Look, and then you shall live'.

Look unto Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no one else. Isaiah 45:22

There is no need to argue with Calvinists about their errors. They already know that they are perverting the word of God. Every Calvinist who has ever been truly born again, knows that repentance and faith precede regeneration. This is how they themselves were saved.

Every born again Calvinist was first confronted with his own very real and willful sins. He then acknowledged them and came to believe in the only possible solution for them; the death of Christ upon the cross. The Calvinist then cast himself upon the mercy of God, and was regenerated and given the Holy Spirit. All of this happened because the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-10); not of election, foreknowledge and predestination.

I myself eventually came to repentance and faith after the preaching of fellow high school students, who warned me to 'flee from the wrath to come'. And the Holy Spirit reinforced their message, convicting me of the fact that my eternal destiny rested in my own choice to repent or not to repent.

Those young men, who God used so powerfully in our teenage years to turn many to repentance and faith, went on to pursue pastoral careers as Calvinists. In doing so, they disobeyed the Lord Jesus and ignored the 'Old Time Religion' that He had shown them in their early years:

And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment; that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. 2 John 6

Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works. Or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of its place; unless you repent. Revelation 2:5-6

Remember therefore how you have received and heard. Hold fast, and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief. And you shall not know what hour I will come upon you. Revelation 3:3