

History and Beliefs of the International Churches of Christ

(Formerly Boston Church of Christ)

Steven E. Rauchno offers a brief description of this controversial group based on his personal experience.

Organization Structure: Totalitarian authority structure with Kip McKean as Director and unquestioned leader. Under McKean are a group of Elders including Al Baird and Bob Gempel. Under the Elders are Evangelists including Gordon Ferguson.

Unique Terms: Discipler is a term for a church leader.

Other Names: Multiplying Ministries or Discipling Movement.

HISTORY

"The movement had been labeled the 'Crossroads Movement' because it originated in the Crossroads Church of Christ by Chuck Lucas, who was a campus minister at the University of Florida. Following the termination of Chuck Lucas by the Crossroads Church in August, 1985 for 'recurring sins in his life,' the leadership of the movement was taken over more by Kip McKean. McKean had trained in the discipling methodology by Lucas while a student at the University of Florida".

"McKean and Roger Lamb had both been fired from their jobs as campus ministers in Charleston, Ill., by their sponsoring church, the Memorial Church of Christ of Houston, Tex., in April 1977. This happened at a time when the media began reporting mounting evidence of cultic practices and emotional manipulation by the movement. From Charleston, McKean moved to the Lexington, Mass., and using the discipling methods, the church expanded rapidly" (Cult Awareness Network News, May 1989, p. 7).

In his Ten Year Report, McKean reminisced about the rapid growth of the Boston movement. He wrote, "My memory is still quite vivid of Elena and I pulling into the Gempels' driveway on June 1, 1979. A growing understanding of true New Testament discipleship allowed the Spirit to bring 103 people to Christ the very first year! Multiplication continued in the second year as 200 were baptized; 256 the third; 368 the fourth; 457 the fifth; 679 the sixth; 735 the seventh; 947 the eighth; 1424 the ninth; and in our tenth year, 1621 were baptized into Christ!" (as quoted in What Does The Boston Movement Teach? Jerry Jones, Vol. 1, p. 125).

In 1982 the Boston movement began planting their pillar churches. These are churches in key cities throughout the world. The first two were established in Chicago and London. Then in 1986, a program called reconstruction was undertaken. This is the process whereby ministers in established Church of Christ churches are replaced with Boston Church of Christ trained ministers (Ibid., pp. 126-127).

Though the Boston movement began under the auspices of the Gainesville, Florida Crossroads Church of Christ, in 1988 this church "officially disassociated" itself from the Boston group (CAN News, May 1989). The movement that began with 30 members has grown into a "global empire of 103 congregations from California to Cairo with total Sunday attendance of 50,000" (Time, 18 May 1992, p. 62).

DOCTRINE

"Ten years ago the northern United States and Europe were considered cold, closed fields to the gospel of Jesus Christ" wrote Kip McKean in his World Missions report (What Does The Boston Movement Teach?, p. 124). Based on this premise, it is not surprising that he began teaching that the Boston Church of Christ was "the only true 'Christian' religion" (The Cult Observer, Sept./Oct.

1987, p. 1). This only true church theology then lead to abuses in both ecclesiastical authority and practice. Doctrines such as an unbiblical form of discipleship, unquestioned submission to authority and Baptismal Regeneration are not unusual in such environments.

Authority and Submission

In a series of articles distributed to the membership of the Boston Church, Elder Al Baird wrote, "If it were true that leaders can only expect Christians to obey direct commands from the Bible, then they can call for nothing that any other member can call for."

So that there would be no misunderstanding about the definition of submission, Baird explained, "Let us begin our discussion of submission by talking about what it is not. (1) Submission is not agreeing. When one agrees with the decision that he is called to submit to, he does not really have to submit in any way. By definition, submission is doing something one has been asked to do that he would not do if he had his own way. (2) Submission is not just outward obedience. It includes that, but also involves obedience from the heart. It is a wholehearted giving-up of one's own desires. (3) Submission is not conditional. We submit to authority, not because the one in authority deserves it, but because the authority comes from God; therefore, we are in reality submitting to God."

Later in this same series, Baird states, "When we are under authority, we are to submit and obey our leaders even when they are not very Christ-like. However, God has standards for His leaders, and they will be accountable to God for ignoring those standards" (Authority and Submission, parts III, V and VII as quoted in What Does The Boston Movement Teach?, pp. 59-63).

Simply stated, Baird, who McKean compared to Moses and Joshua, explained to the membership that if the leader commands one to do something, even if it is not "Christ-like," the member must submit! (Ibid., p. 104).

This control can be seen not only in spiritual matters but also in activities of everyday life and even in matters of couples private lives. Many who have left the Boston Church "complain that the advice, which members are expected to obey, may include such details as where to live, whom and when to date, what courses to take in school, even how often to have sex with a spouse" (Time, 18 May 1992, p. 62). Dr. Ron Enroth sites further examples of this when he writes that members are sometimes "required (to have) permission to call one another for dates. The amount of control exercised over (a person's) life extended to extremely personal levels. Members would quite very good jobs to be 'in the ministry' full-time. It was a sign of their dedication to God. Disciplers would tell married couples when and how to have sex" (Churches That Abuse, p. 113, parenthesis added).

In an environment such as the Boston Church, the adage Power Corrupts and Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely would seem to be appropriate. In speaking of the Elders of the Boston Church, "McKean says these leaders govern by consensus but adds, 'I'm the one who gives them direction.' Says Al Baird, a veteran Boston elder: 'It's not a dictatorship. It's a theocracy, with God on top,' (Time, 18 May 1992, p. 62). Of course, it was also Baird who said, "In questions of spiritual leaders abusing their authority. It is not an option to rebel against their authority" (What Does The Boston Movement Teach? p. 7).

Baptismal Regeneration

Succinctly stated, "The Boston Church of Christ teaches that when one initially receives Jesus Christ, one's response must include faith, repentance, confession, and water baptism. It teaches that apart from water baptism, one's sins are not forgiven" (The Issue of Water Baptism and the Boston Church of Christ, E. Bourland, P. Owen and P. Reid, p. 1).

Not only must one be baptized, but one must also be baptized in the Boston Church of Christ. If a person had been a member of some other church, then joins the Boston Church, they must be

rebaptized because their original baptism was done in a false church and under a diluted set of false presuppositions.

Gordon Ferguson, an Evangelist in the Boston Church explained this in his series titled, *Progressive Revelation: Disciple's Baptism*. He wrote, "Peter was promised the `keys' (terms of entrance) to the Kingdom of God. The terms of entrance that he was inspired by the Spirit to preach included baptism." Ferguson next discussed how the truth about baptism and its link to salvation were re-discovered in stages.

He states, "Stage two was marked by the discovery that baptism was for forgiveness of sins to be saved. Interestingly enough, the Restoration leaders, who made this discovery initially felt that a `retroactive' understanding was sufficient. In Boston, we do not believe retroactive understanding is sufficient. Stage three focused on the need to be baptized with the conviction that baptism was indeed necessary for salvation. Therefore, anyone who had been baptized while believing that he was already saved was taught to be immersed again for the correct reasons (that is - to be forgiven and saved)" (as quoted in *What Does The Boston Movement Teach?*, p. 75).

Hence, salvation in the Boston Church depends not only on Jesus' death on the cross, but also on baptism. Further, not simply baptism but baptism by one having the proper authority the Boston Church of Christ.

Other Doctrines One of the most disturbing practices of the Boston Church surrounds its proselyting new members on college campuses throughout the world. In *Cultism on Campus*, Robert Thornburg explained, "Students and administrators at Boston University and other campuses in the greater Boston area have recently been greatly troubled by the aggressive and intrusive proselyting of the Boston Church of Christ (BCC). The grades of many students drawn into this organization have suffered, says Rev. Robert Watts Thornburg, the Dean of BU's Marsh Chapel. He adds that more than 150 from area campuses, some with especially promising careers, have left school in the last 5 years to proselytize further for the BCC" (*The American Family Foundation Newsletter*, October 1987, p. 1).

According to the *Dallas Morning News*, the Boston Church seeks its "converts in student unions and dormitories" across the country (20 December 1992, p. 2-A). Not only does membership effect the grades and possible careers of the students, it may also have an effect on their financial stability. "At its Sunday service, the church takes in about \$45,000 from members, one-third of whom are college students" (*The Cult Observer*, Sept./Oct. 1987, p. 13).

The abusive mind control techniques used in the Boston Church of Christ has left many casualties requiring psychological and psychiatric care for recovery. The extent of their destructive methods has prompted a number of colleges to take the unprecedented step of banning the movement from their campuses. Boston University, Marquette University, University of Southern California, Northeastern University, and Vanderbilt University are among some that have banned the Boston Church of Christ (*Miami Herald*, 25 March 1992, p. 1A, 15A).

Finally, the oppressive doctrine of submission, which would necessarily include working for the Kingdom and financial obligations to the Boston Church, are all tied to their doctrine of sin. As Gordon Ferguson explains, "sin is a failure to do good. If we are not doing what disciples are commanded to do, we are not saved" (*What Does The Boston Movement Teach?*, p. 75). Remember, it is the Disciplers, be they Christ-like or not, who are controlling the lives of the members. Part of this control is the daily instruction, the determination of what is good and the reminder that rebellion against those in authority is not an option. This unbiblical type of discipleship subtracts from Christ's role as the sole mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). In addition to the teaching that this

is the only true, their doctrine of works salvation (through baptism, etc.), directs followers away from the finished work of Christ on the cross as the only remedy for sin and source of salvation.

International Church of Christ

GENERAL THINGS TO LOOK FOR

I was personally "sucked" into the International Church of Christ movement without knowing it for about two months. A student at my university came up to me and asked, "Would you like to study the Bible with me?" After asking what church he attended, I agreed. But two months later, with time to reflect on it, I was forced to leave as I discovered it was a cult. That student was their campus evangelist, even taking classes at my university. These are characteristics of that organization I witnessed:

1. Withholding information about their organization. They only tell you the name of their church, which is "(name of city) Church of Christ." You would scarcely know anything about a larger organization. They just say they're non-denominational. They may even deny association with Boston. (If you visit their church, the preface page of their hymn book has "Boston Church of Christ" as the publisher. That's a pretty good indicator. Plus, you may look for a leadership structure of campus evangelists, bible-talk leaders, zone evangelists, and church evangelists. Either that, or match them to the characteristics of any counter-cult publication about them.)

2. Taking verses about Christian living and using them as entrance requirements for salvation. They'll bring up a verse about discipleship and suggest you must be that way, work up to it, or continue that way without faltering in order to be saved. If they were talking about living out a Christian life or about spiritual growth it would be okay, as opposed to entering or remaining in a Christian status. The most severe passage they use is I John 2:3-6. They even use Acts 11 about the disciples being called "Christians" in Antioch. They say only disciples (those who evangelize and teach) can be Christians based on that verse.

[NOTE: The evangelist said he usually doesn't go that far on the first visit. He started out with scattered verses about discipleship from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This whole point wasn't obvious to me at my first few Bible studies.]

3. They assume the Bible has a different salvation message to Jews than to Gentiles. In other words, they believe the Jews only had to believe in Jesus to be saved, with verses like John 3:16 and Romans 10:9. The ICofC believes that the Jews were already obedient to God in the Old Law, were already spreading their faith, and were already baptized. (The baptism part is the easiest to disprove, by the way.) All they had to do was believe in Jesus, whom they had rejected. In contrast, the ICofC teaches that Gentiles have to obey God's commands, spread their faith, and be baptized in order to be saved--above and beyond merely believing in Jesus. According to the ICofC, Gentiles weren't doing the necessary requirements the Jews were already doing. Whenever you point out a verse about simply believing in Jesus for salvation, they will immediately say, "That was for the Jews." Strangely, this is their first reaction to any verse--even ones about Gentiles, until I show them that it's about Gentiles.

4. Disarming the Book of Romans, saying it was written only to the Jews. You can read Romans 1 and get a different picture. They also believe that verses like John 3:16 were written only to Jews, where believing is the only requirement for receiving salvation or eternal life. An argument about the nature of the word 'whoever' could easily be made.

They also think believing is a work, as Jesus said in John 6:26-29 and then ridicule you for quoting Eph. 2:8,9. To defeat that, you need to see that 'works' is defined differently in both those passages. Anyhow, Romans is a very powerful book, so they first try to stop you from using it. Don't let them!

5. **A theology that belief in Jesus is not enough, even being a disciple is not enough, unless you then get baptized in order to get saved.** They would wait a while to present baptism. They progress from the "believe in Jesus" stage to the "discipleship" stage to the "baptism" stage, starting from historic Christianity and slowly moving to their cultic beliefs. They hide the "higher" points from you until they feel you're ready. (Who knows what I would have learned if I had continued!)
6. **They have a very good method of combining social events with Bible studies for new people.** One thing to look for is this: social events are only with their people. They mingle only within their sphere, their church. Exclusivity and elitism is not mentioned--or even denied--but is practiced, which leads me to my seventh point.
7. **Contradictions! They will say one thing and do exactly the opposite.** It takes a little time to notice things like this. For instance, they deny preaching "saved by works." Yet, they clearly teach that a "disciple's life is full of works," and only disciples can be baptized, and baptism a necessity for salvation. You just need to put two and two together. They also say that independent Bible research and skepticism is okay, but then rebuke and expel you if you disagree with them even if based squarely on the Bible. At one point, I could list out 30 contradictions. (I wish I had written them down back then!)
8. **Demanding a new person submit a "sin list."** A sin list is a written list of all your sins. They get personal information very early in their relationship with new people. They say it will help you measure your improvements. However, what they don't tell you is that the list is not kept confidential. They use personal information to brainwash! Anything you do, even things outside the list, are not kept confidential. (One time a girl I didn't even know asked, "How did your talk go with your pastor?" To me, that was a personal thing and I was shocked she knew about it. If you're really hesitant to give a list--like I was--they wait a few Bible studies and keep reminding you and then if you don't, they have you say it out loud while someone else writes it down. (Even after submitting a list, they still wanted to know personal things I hadn't told them.)
9. **They study a list of sins in Galatians 5:19-21 and then repeat the last sentence of verse 21 over and over again: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."** They mean that even though you believe in Jesus (already past the believing stage) and commit a sin, you won't go to heaven. In other words, if you don't successfully stop sinning altogether, you won't enter heaven. This is their theology of repentance. At least, that's what they preach to you. (Pretty strict. Looks like salvation by works because they include sins of omission. I later saw contradictions in this by their actions.) They believe you have to confess to church leaders to receive forgiveness.
10. **Strict obedience to leaders at all cost.** Without question. They even give orders that have no spiritual significance.
11. **They tell you which school to enroll in, what classes to attend, what to major in, what job to take, whom to date, and whom to marry, etc.**
12. **They believe your sins are "covered" by your leader if they order you to perform a sinful act, as long as you were obedient.** To them, it wasn't sin as long as you were obedient. This is called covering.
13. **Use of scare tactics to provoke obedience, telling them they're going to hell, etc, if they don't obey.** Personal information from my sin list, for example, was used against me when I disagreed over a biblical point. After I won the point biblically and they knew it. (That is, telling me I'm not over such and such a sin. And if I don't stay and agree with them, I'll never get over it.)

14. Use of social attachment to keep the person in the church. (This is a corollary to point #6.) As mentioned earlier, they do a good job of creating a social and emotional attachment. They are very loving. If the person wants to leave, they say something like, "Has any other group shown you so much love? How can you leave us?" They also use this to get obedience. A leader may even boast about fasting three days for you. Social forces are also used, if needed, to get you to write a "sin list" or to move you forward on their agenda if you become hesitant.

15. They believe you have to do the "works of a disciple" in order to be a disciple. That includes witnessing to someone. Naturally, this means evangelizing before you get saved. (This corresponds to point #2.)

16. They believe that if you sin, you weren't serious about God and thus not saved in the first place. (This is a corollary to point #9.) This includes not obeying every commandment. They say, "How can you be serious and not obey God?" In another form: "How can you be serious and commit sin?"

17. Light and darkness illustration. They do a Bible study on light and darkness to illustrate that you're not in the light and thus not saved. They base their notion of a totally successful repentance needed for salvation on I Peter 2:9-11, but like to emphasize I John 1:6,7. They use a few other passages that have the words "light" and "darkness" in them. (At first, they allow you to say that you're in the light. They do this very early, in just the second Bible study. They even go along with you, to keep you from suspecting something. Later on, they come back to this illustration and would strongly convince you otherwise. This illustration relies heavily on binary logic.)

18. No musical instruments in praise and worship. Just scapula.

19. They meet in rented church buildings and often move from time to time. They're also extremely proud of their church. (Most people I met used to attend Christian churches, which they negatively call "religious." Their evangelism plan is to get Christians because it's easier, and they sometimes get non-Christians. Almost everyone ranged in the college and career age and I noticed no complete families.)

After all that, here's some positive aspects to look for:

1. They're right about the Bible--and they use the NIV.
2. They're right about Creation, the Fall of Man, sin, and the nature and power of God. (Unknown about Trinity, but I'm guessing that's okay.)
3. They're right about the eternal existence of heaven and hell, except about exactly who's going there.
4. They're right about the Atonement, Jesus' suffering and death on the Cross and His physical, bodily resurrection. In fact, they do a lengthy and detailed Bible study just on this. A good job, but only done to trick you into thinking they're Christian. (They knew I already knew this about Jesus, but continued to cover all the basics. That was in the belief stage.)
5. They're right about Jesus' identity. (Well, I'm guessing they're right about it. They say He's the "son of God" in their notes; I could tell it was lowercased. I asked them about what the term "Son of God" means and they always managed to change the subject. They never told me what 'Son of God' means in the Bible studies, just that it's Jesus. They used the term quite often.)
6. Their attitude about sin is excellent. It's just how they extend it to matters of salvation that's wrong.

7. Their attitude about evangelism is also most excellent. It's just too bad they incorporate it into their salvation theology.

8. They're right about Revelations 3:20, that it's context is repentance to a backsliding church. The verse should not be used for salvation. (However, just "opening the door and letting Him in" appears to contradict their harsh teaching on repentance.) [This whole point is still in debate, but avoiding this one verse shouldn't matter.]

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Water baptism and salvation

by Jim Abrahamson

from apttoteach.org (theology file #812)

1. Water baptism is equated with regeneration (salvation) in both high church circles where it is identified with circumcision of the Old Covenant and in low church circles by the Churches of Christ sect.
2. **Defining the issue**
 - a. The issue IS NOT the necessity of water baptism in one's recognition as a Christian. Water baptism is not to be viewed as an optional event in becoming a Christian. In the N.T., if a person was not water baptized, they were probably not recognized as Christians. This is not to say however that, in God's eyes, they were outside the kingdom of God. Water baptism is the mark of initiation into the Christian church.
 - b. The real questions ARE:
 1. What is the relationship between WATER BAPTISM and THE TIME OF REGENERATION? Is water baptism a means of grace whereby God bestows forgiveness, spiritual life, and union with Christ? Is saving faith incomplete until water baptism is properly administered?
 2. Must a person be WATER BAPTIZED "FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS" (with a view to that act of baptism being the point at which the sins are removed)?
3. **Understanding the Church of Christ sect.**
 - a. The CHURCH OF CHRIST is a nondenominational (really an anti-denominational) fellowship of some 12,000 autonomous congregations (2,000,000 people) which trace their origin to the "RESTORATION MOVEMENT" (recovery of N.T. Christianity) of the mid 1800s in the Southeastern U.S. The ministries of THOMAS & ALEXANDER CAMPBELL, JAMES O'KELLY, ABNER JONES, ELIAS SMITH, & BARTON STONE were influential in formulating a pattern of doctrine and practice that was characterized by:
 1. A plea for unity on the basis of faith in Christ over anti sectarian doctrines.
 2. A conservative, Arminian, baptistic theology with only the Bible as its creed.
 3. A commitment to restore the contemporary church to its N.T. foundation by trying to replicate the practices, standards & teachings of the 1st century church.
 - b. NOTE THE FOLLOWING SLOGANS OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT:
 1. "No creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the Divine".
 2. "We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only".
 3. "In matters of doctrine unity, in matters of opinion liberty, in all things love."

- c. In time, certain distinctives became major points of division between the Churches of Christ and other groups, (thus eroding the initial commitment to avoid sectarian beliefs). As with most anti-denominational groups there is a tendency to become (in an informal sense) even MORE sectarian than other formal denominations. Among these distinctives are:
1. Arminian views of the security of the believer. A believer can lose his salvation through disobedience.
 2. The refusal to join any inter-congregational organization. This would include para-church missionary organizations.
 3. The proscription of any musical instruments in worship. All singing is to be without instruments.
 4. An avoidance of all “sectarian” (non-biblical) terminology. Theological or denominational terms like “Baptist” or “Arminian” are to be avoided.
 5. A DISTINCTIVE VIEW OF WATER BAPTISM AS THE POINT OF REGENERATION. This is the issue in these notes.

6. Texts in question

MATT. 28:19 “Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

It is suggested by some that this text teaches us that water baptism IS THE ISSUE in making disciples. In this passage, the initiation into the process of discipleship is our union with Christ. Water baptism (the symbol of that union) is an appropriate and common metaphor in this context (note Col.2:11-12 where baptism is likened to circumcision). The focal issue in this passage is the NAME into which a person was baptized not baptism as the MEANS of salvation.

MK. 16:16 “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.”

This text is understood by some to teach that faith PLUS baptism is necessary for salvation. I would respond by saying that baptism is here a description of the kind of faith (or the extent of the faith) that saves - it is an open faith (not a private faith). The real issue however is faith, as the last clause indicates. This would mean that if a person professed faith and was UNWILLING to be baptized he or she would be indicating that their faith was not saving faith but something short of it.

JOHN 3:5 “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.’”

Does the “water” in this text refer to Christian baptism? The water here, more likely refers to the baptizing ministry of John the Baptist (not a Christian baptism - see above) which marked those who were penitent and looking for the Christ. The Jews who participated in John's baptism and were recipients of the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost would make up the early church (enter the kingdom). It is also possible that John is thinking of Ezek.36:25-27 where “cleansing” & “renewal” are linked. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”

ACTS 2:38 “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent (plural), {and let each of you be baptized (singular) in the name of Jesus Christ} for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

This is one of the primary proof texts, where the Church of Christ would insist that the forgiveness of sins is directly tied to baptism. It should be noted however that the clause “and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” can be understood as parenthetical because of the harmony between Greek tenses indicated above. This suggests that we have here, a reiteration of Matt.28:19. The relationship between REPENTANCE and forgiveness is the key. Luke’s writing (Lk.24:47; Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 26:18-20) is clearly in support of this connection. Only in 2:38, & 22:16 is baptism even mentioned, and in these texts the link with forgiveness is not compelling.

ACTS 22:16 “And now why do you delay? {Arise (participle), and be baptized (imperative)} {and wash away (imperative) your sins, calling (participle) on His name.}”

This verse is thought to link "baptized" with “wash away your sins”. The verse, however, can be divided into two clauses that point to a different connection. The baptism can just as well be linked to “Arise” as "wash away your sins". Baptism is however, a picture of God's inner work of washing away sin (I Cor. 6:11 “And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”). "Calling on His name” is the key (not baptism) to the removal of sin as Rom.10:9-14, Acts 2:21, & Joel 2:32 indicate.

GAL. 3:27 “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Some, have suggested that “baptized” here is a reference to water baptism and that it is the act of clothing oneself with Christ. While it may be said that water baptism does picture our union with Christ it is not clear that water baptism is in view here. This is more likely the “baptism of or in the Holy Spirit” which according to Paul, unites all believers to Christ & His church (I Cor.12:12-13 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks,---”. See also Titus 3:5 with Ezek.36:25-27). This is the baptism referred to in Rom.6:3-4 “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

EPH. 5:26 “that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.”

Does the “washing of water” here refer to Christian baptism? In this passage the metaphor of “washing of water” pictures the purification ritual of the Old Covenant (Ezek.36:25-27 above) which is accomplished here by the effectual (faith quickening) preaching of the word. In other texts it is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Look at Titus 3:5 “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,” Heb. 10:22 “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The references to O.T. CEREMONIAL CLEANSING (sprinkled, pure water) in this text are hard to escape.

COL.2:11-12 “--- and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

This text is used by the Church of Christ to teach that AT THE MOMENT of water baptism the believer is united with Christ's death and resurrection. It is my sense that baptism pictures our union with Christ's death and resurrection just as circumcision pictures an Israelite's union with the covenant community. In Rom.4:9-13 & Gal.5:1-6, Paul makes it very clear that Abraham was saved BEFORE he was circumcised. So it is, I conclude with those who are baptized.

I PET. 3:21 “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

This text, we are told, clearly teaches that baptism saves. I would respond by noting that two things are said about baptism in this passage: (1) It corresponds to the salvation (separation) of Noah from his sinful generation via the flood - vs.20. The salvation in view here is not from sin or condemnation but from a wicked age or environment. (2) It is an appeal, by 1st century believers, to God for a good conscience. That is to say, it saves them (separating them, and giving them confidence through their union with Christ which baptism pictures) from their sinful generation.

7. Objections to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

a. Scriptural objections

1. The great emphasis in the Apostles teaching that salvation (justification, regeneration) was of:

REPENTANCE: “Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away,”
Acts 3:19.

See also Lk.24:47 “and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations,”; **Acts 5:31** “to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”; **Acts 11:18** “repentance that leads to life”; **Acts 26:18-20** “so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins ---”

FAITH: “If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?” (to baptize) **Acts 11:17**

See also Jn.1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”; **Jn.3:14-16** “that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.”; **Jn.7:37-40** “that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life.”; **Acts 10:43** “that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.”; **Acts 13:38-39** “through Him every one who believes is freed”; **Acts 15:9** “cleansing their hearts by faith.”; **Rom.3:21-4:8** “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”; **Rom.9:33** “and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.”; **Rom.10:10** “for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation.”; **I Cor.1:21** “to save those who believe”; **Gal.2:16** “a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus”; **Gal.3:2** “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”; **Gal.3:26** “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”; **Eph.1:13** “having also believed, you were sealed in Him”; **Eph.2:8-10** “For by grace you have been saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”; **I Tim.1:16** “for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”; **I Jn.5:1** “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”; **I Jn.5:13** “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”

NOTE: In not one of the above texts is baptism mentioned as instrumental to salvation while the repeated and clear reference is to "repentance" and "faith" as the key issue. If water baptism was essential to salvation it is inconceivable that it would not be mentioned.

2. **The testimony of Paul’s ministry in I Cor.1:14-16** where, in preaching the gospel, he demphasized baptism “I thank God that I baptized none of you, --- For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel,”. If baptism was the point at which sins were removed, Paul seems to have left a lot of people in their sins. Is this plausible?
3. **The experience of Cornelius in Acts 10:43-47, 11:13-18** where believers were baptized AFTER receiving the Spirit. This would be impossible if baptism were necessary to bring salvation.
4. **The obedience of faith:** “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” **Jn. 6:29**. Outward acts of obedience do not satisfy the demand of the gospel while inner faith does. See also **Jn.3:36; Acts 6:7; Rom.10:16, 16:26; II Thess.1:8; I Pet.1:22, 2:7-8, 4:17**.
5. **The testimony of Jesus against the Pharisees in Matt.15:11** “Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth,”. The Pharisees insisted that the outward form of faith (in this case the washing of hands) be the mark of a person’s “right standing” with God while Jesus drew attention to the inner heart as the real issue.
6. **The testimony of Paul concerning circumcision and faith in Rom.4:9-13**. In this passage Paul argues that circumcision came after saving faith and that Abraham was justified by faith BEFORE he outwardly obeyed the law. NOTE ALSO **Gal.5:1-6, 6:15**. These passages are so clear and fundamental to Paul's teaching about God's grace that it is hard to imagine how anyone could miss the point - INNER FAITH NOT OUTER CEREMONY OR CONFORMITY TO THE LAW BRINGS SALVATION.
7. **The many exhortations to unity in Christ on basic doctrine and tolerance in areas of sectarian differences - I Cor.1-3:** While I can respect my brothers and sisters in the Church of Christ as a part of God's family even though we may have a different view of the Biblical teaching on some issues; I am not able to respect their stand of excluding from fellowship (recognition as fellow Christians) those who disagree with them on this issue.

b. Common sense objections

1. **Is it plausible** that only those who have been baptized "for the forgiveness of their sins" (as the Church of Christ understands that phrase) are saved? This means that only people in the Church of Christ (which had its origin in the late 1800s) are true Christians.
2. **Is it credible** for a fellowship of believers to claim to:

- **have no creed**, when they hold so strictly and dogmatically to unique interpretations of Scripture? The concept that there is to be "no creed but Christ" flies in the face of the narrow interpretations of much of the N.T. which became something of an informal (unwritten) creed along side Christ.
- **be committed to unity**, when their own history is riddled with divisions over trivia and when they exclude all others as non-Christians on the basis of a narrow understanding of baptism? NOTE: The Churches of Christ split from the Disciples of Christ in 1906. Subsequently there have been many more splits over relatively trivial matters. At least 6 groups can be identified:
 1. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental.
 2. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Liberal.
 3. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - One Cup.
 4. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Premillennial.
 5. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Non-Sunday School.
 6. Church of Christ - Non-Instrumental - Conservative.

Conclusions

1. MY SENSE IS THAT MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST HAVE AN INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING AND EMPHASIS UPON GOD'S GRACE & THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Outward obedience to the "letter of the law" of Scripture is stressed in a way that reminds one of the Old Covenant creating anxiety and fear, not joy and peace. In order to sense that a person is in good standing with God, obedience is centered on outward superficial issues that can be more easily controlled (church attendance, confessional standards, etc.) while ignoring the struggles of the heart (sectarian spirit, pride, etc.). The believer's salvation is secured only by continued perseverance in faith that is expressed through obedience with little if any emphasis upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. SOME ANALOGIES MAY HELP US UNDERSTAND CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

What the "ALTAR CALL" became to early American revivalists, water baptism was to the first century church. It was the way in which a believer expressed his or her entrance into the faith. People came to the altar to express faith, not to get it; so it was with baptism as well.

Water baptism can also be compared to a MARRIAGE CEREMONY. The marriage ceremony is not the place where two people really decided to commit their lives to each other, nor is it the place where they consummated their union (though it could and often is spoken of as such). Likewise, water baptism is not the point where saving faith comes, but rather the public and official celebration / initiation of the person into the visible church (body of believers). It is understandable that water baptism would be spoken of (in Scripture & culture) as the point of initiation (like the marriage ceremony).

Another analogy might be CIRCUMCISION (Col.2:11-12). In this case, water baptism, like circumcision, is an outward sign of one's identification with the covenant community. Under the Old Covenant this was a national community. Under the New Covenant it is a spiritual community of faith.

Another analogy can be made with our Lord's reference to the BREAD & CUP - "This is my body / blood". The bread and cup were NOT His body & blood, yet it was not an inappropriate use of language to refer to these symbols as such. In the same way it is not strange for the Biblical writers to refer to "baptism" and "washing away of sins" when describing the justification of faith.

In saying this, I am maintaining a distinction between SAVING FAITH (justification, regeneration by the Holy Spirit) and WATER BAPTISM (the official expression of that faith). It is the INNER FAITH not the OUTER EXPRESSION that unites a person with Christ. This was the gist of Jesus conflict with the Pharisees who insisted that nothing really counted before God until the outer demands of the law were satisfied. The outer expression of faith is very important however, in that it identifies a person outwardly with the church (the body of Christ). Many evangelical groups have not respected the important role of water baptism and the need to correctly emphasize it. This neglect does not however justify the distorted emphasis brought by the CHURCH OF CHRIST.