

9-27-96

Dear Teofil,

I am sorry that it has taken me such a long time to give you any personal answer to your letter. I trust that you and your family are well and happy in serving God in Jesus Christ. And I hope that the materials that I directed you to have been helpful.

We cannot rightly interpret Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38 as being in conflict with each other. All the references to baptism are in harmony. It is when we emphasize one reference over the others that we build conflict.

Jesus authorized or commanded that they baptize believers throughout the world in/into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet as they did that, we read that at times at least they were told to be baptized in the name of Jesus. To do something *in the name of* someone means to do it *in behalf of* or *by the authority of* that person. So, if they baptized by the authority of Jesus, what baptism did they administer? Baptism in the name of Jesus was baptism in/into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is really no problem for they are the **one** and same baptism.

I cannot apologize for Peter who had been appointed as God's spokesman and who was filled with the HS for telling them to be baptized for the remission of sins. I cannot tell people to disregard what Peter told them to do. Can you? Peter was not preaching "Church of Christ doctrine." He preached what Jesus had authorized and what the Spirit guided him to say. Even if every person on earth declared Peter to be wrong on the matter of baptism for the remission of sins, that would not make him wrong. It would only demonstrate how wrong people can be in their misunderstanding.

I am sure that when most people are baptized, they do it in order to obey Christ. They know he commanded baptism; so they want to do his will in order to be saved. It is unlikely that any person understands all the purposes and meanings of baptism before he or she is immersed. Faith, not perfect understanding, is required of the one being baptized. We have been too judgmental in demanding that a person be baptized knowingly "for the remission of sins" while we overlook all the other purposes of baptism. If I remember correctly, the booklet by Ketcherside dealt with these things.

The Catholic Church taught baptism for the remission of sins to such an extreme that they developed the doctrine of "baptismal regeneration." An infant could be baptized for the remission of sins and to be born again without faith! Protestants went to the other extreme in promoting "regeneration by faith" without any accepting action on the part of the believer. Both extremes fall short of the truth.

Abraham, Noah, David, Elijah, John the Baptist, and the thief on the cross were not baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and HS because they had not been taught to do so. They lived and died before Jesus gave his commission in Matthew 18:19. If Jesus wanted to give forgiveness to a person or persons like the thief on the cross in a special act of grace, that is wonderful. But I cannot depend upon that for myself for he told us of all the nations to believe and be baptized. Is it an act of faith to ignore his Great Commission and rely on salvation like the thief on the cross? He commanded us to be baptized with the promise that "he who believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark

16:16), but he did not command us to follow the example of the thief on the cross. You quote that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do you mean that he never became flesh, never ascended back to glory, never became High Priest, and has never changed what was required of men? His faithful character has not changed, but what has been asked of man has changed.

Certainly, Jesus had no sins of his own needing forgiveness; so his baptism was “to fulfill all righteousness,” whatever that means. He was to take all our sins; so in baptism he identified with all who would accept his atonement.

I have never heard of anyone teaching that water or simply immersing a person in water could remove sins.

If a man wished to be baptized and died on the way to the water, would he be saved? You asked that. Let me ask you one. If an unbeliever wished to hear the gospel, asked a teacher to come to teach him about Jesus, and died as the teacher rang the doorbell, would he be saved? Such questions are raised by people trying to find exceptions to what the Bible teaches. God can save whomever he wishes. But why try to find exceptions to follow instead of accepting the terms God gives in his Word?

You indicate in your letter that I have left the Church of Christ. That is not true. Even though there is much need of correction in it, I can serve God as well in it as I could in any other church. All churches have their misdirections, shortcomings, and personnel problems.

OK, I will let you go for now with this bit of exhortation: don't let your bitterness toward the people at SSOP affect your interpretation and acceptance of the truth.