

FREEDOM'S RING

"Proclaim liberty throughout the land" (Lev. 25:10)

Cecil & Lea Hook

10905 SW Mira Ct, Tigard, OR 97223-3838

503-624-5760; <hookc@teleport.com> <Cecil@freedomring.org> <<http://www.freedomring.org>>

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Rebaptism For "The Right Purpose"

Why introduce this over-worked subject again? It is because we in the Church of Christ have let it block the path to unity. Our rejection of others because they were not baptized purposely "for the remission of sins" separates us from the greater portion of believers. In this, we have become rejecting judges denying the very validity of the discipleship of others.

We in the Church of Christ probably have discussed baptism more than any other group because we have considered it of more importance than most other Christian groups. It seems that by now we should have laid the subject to rest. I think I have dealt with the subject sufficiently for my readers in general in my books. However, now being on the Web with new readers who are not familiar with the views I have expressed, I hope this essay may offer some helpful clarification.

In proclaiming Jesus' promise that "he who believes and is baptized will be saved," we have also used the emphatic statement of Peter on Pentecost, "Repent, and be baptized every of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). Although most all Christian groups practice baptism as an act of obedience to Christ, they generally teach that believing is the only necessary action of obedience in order to receive forgiveness. So they think they are saved before obedience in baptism. Since those persons are not baptized purposely "for the forgiveness of your sins," many of my people contend that those persons should be rebaptized specifically for that purpose.

By denying the validity of the baptism of such persons, many in the Church of Christ actually deny that such persons are saved, and they offer them no fellowship or admission into their congregations. So this goes beyond friendly discussion about accepting disciples and is made the basis of rejection. Rebaptism becomes a dividing issue.

Let me clarify this point in the beginning. Allowing God to be God who may make gracious exceptions as he may choose, I am convinced that ordinarily baptism is an essential action on the part of the sinner in accepting the grace of God bestowed in Christ. The contention of this essay is that one is not required to understand each and every purpose or result of baptism in order for God to fulfill those purposes and effects.

Is "for the remission of your sins" a part of the command or a part of the promise? If it is a part of the command, then one is required to understand that purpose and to be immersed specifically for that purpose. If it is a part of the promise, then it is fulfilled by God to the one obeying his command to be immersed whether that person understands fully or not.

If, in order for baptism to be valid, one must understand its purpose, let us look at the stated purposes. In Peter's

declaration on Pentecost, he first called for convicting faith. Then he called for them to repent and be baptized in order for their sins to be forgiven. Can anyone deny that both faith and repentance, in addition to immersion, are necessary for the remission of sins? Faith, repentance, and baptism are (1) for the forgiveness of sins and (2) to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Shortly after Pentecost, Peter delivered a similar discourse at Solomon's Porch. Even though baptism is not mentioned specifically, he called for faith and, "Repent therefore, and turn again, (3) that your sins may be blotted out, (4) that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and (5) that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:11-22. Numbering added). If a candidate for baptism must understand these five stated purposes and have them in mind for his baptism to be valid, woe is me! I am a goner, a dead duck! I did not fully comprehend them all at that time and I still do not 62 years later! What about you? Were you baptized purposely in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Why make an issue of one promise and not the other? In the one account of rebaptism in the Scriptures, converts of Apollos were asked by Paul, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" We are not told of any inquiry into the understood purpose of their prior baptisms (Acts 19:1-9).

Commands are to be obeyed, but how do you obey a promise? When Jesus announced, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved," he set forth two things that a person can do and the result that God will accomplish. The promised result was not a part of the command. It cannot be obeyed. Neither were any of the five promises enumerated above parts of the command. These are not things a person can do. In Matthew's account of the Great Commission, no mention is made of the purpose or promise connected with baptism (Matt. 28:18-20), yet we can be confident that God saved those who were obedient.

Judean disciples in the Jerusalem church were convinced that circumcision, in addition to obedience in baptism, was necessary to be saved, yet no question is raised about the validity of their baptisms (Acts 15).

Other purposes were fulfilled through baptism in response to faith and repentance also. I shall continue the numbering begun above. We are baptized (6) into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4). By our baptism we are brought (7) into the one body, (8) the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 1:18). It is through this obedience that we are (9) born again, (10) become a child of God, and (11) enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27). There we find (12) newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4) and (13) are circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (Col. 2:11-14).

These are things that God through his Spirit accomplished in and for us when we obeyed him in baptism, whether we understood it or not. If one must have had those

purposes in mind prior to baptism, then few of us could have confidence that God's promises were fulfilled in us. Most of us would need rebaptism! Isn't it amazing how we become hung up on one point!

There is no Biblical record that all the purposes listed above were explained to a person before baptism. The last eight of them were explained to disciples after their baptisms to assure them of what God had accomplished in and for them when he saved them.

Perhaps it will put things in better perspective to look again at the records of conversions in *Acts*. On Pentecost Peter was addressing the very people who had called out for the crucifixion of Jesus. His discourse was designed to turn them from rejecters to believers in Jesus as the Christ. His powerful presentation of Christ caused them to recognize the horrible thing they had done so that they felt doomed. They called out in despair asking rhetorically what they could do when they thought their case was hopeless. They were probably surprised and greatly relieved when Peter told them simply to repent and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In Samaria (*Acts* 8), to these people who had been rejected by the Jews but were eager to serve God, the need for repentance and forgiveness was not mentioned, but great numbers of them were baptized eagerly in acceptance of Christ. A similar pattern is seen as the righteous Ethiopian gladly expressed his acceptance of, and allegiance to, Jesus as his Savior. They were not escaping impending doom due to heinous sins so much as aligning themselves with the one who would save them.

Saul's circumstance was similar to that of the Jews on Pentecost. Being convicted by an appearance of the Lord on the road to Damascus of fighting against God by his frenzied persecution of disciples, Saul cried out, "What shall I do, Lord?" Later, this man who had been fasting and praying in contrition for three days and nights was told to be baptized to wash away his sins (*Acts* 9, 22). Forgiveness was the burning issue with him.

Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing Gentile (*Acts* 10). After God convinced the Jews that he was receiving Gentiles by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his household, Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. No mention is made of "for the remission of sins," for that was not the emphatic issue with them so much as their being initiated into life in Christ. In his Great Commission, Jesus had authorized baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When they baptized in the name of Christ, they were baptizing as Jesus had authorized. It was a matter of obedience to Christ.

In no case was a discourse on baptism delivered to those who were to be immersed. No evidence points to an explanation of all the designs of baptism, nor of reimmersion of the penitents after they learned all the designs. They simply obeyed the expressed will of God -- like we should do, whether we understand all its purposes or not.

Many in our congregations think of baptism as a sacrament, a ritual or ceremony through which grace is conferred to the soul. They think it changes the soul from death to life, affecting a new birth in us. They believe in baptismal regeneration -- that in baptism divine action transforms and regenerates the soul in a new birth process.

Baptism symbolizes, finalizes, and confirms the change that the convert has undergone rather than accomplishing the change. The conversion process is similar to the process of physical birth. There is an insemination, a conception, a period of gestation, and a parturition or birth. The birth finalizes what has been taking place in the womb rather than being the cause of the life developing process. The parturition is necessary, but it is not the cause of life. Life is not conferred, infused, or poured into the fetus at birth, yet the life-giving process is incomplete without it.

In similar manner, a sinner hears the gospel, develops faith, decides to submit his life to God in Christ, begins a process of reformation, and is baptized. Although baptism is necessary in this procedure, it is not the cause of life. Baptism confirms what has already been developing in the person. The regeneration is a process finalized by baptism instead of being produced by it.

Now, must a person who held a sacramental view of baptism be rebaptized when he learns of his misunderstanding? Such a person has obeyed what was commanded. He was not commanded to understand all the purposes and implications. If God does not demand such an understanding, why should we? And again, who could ever qualify for baptism, for it is likely that none of us has understood all. He stands on unholy ground who rejects others who do not have his particular understanding.

The respected pioneers of our Movement did not demand rebaptism of those who had been immersed in other groups. It was later in the nineteenth century that an issue began to be made of it. David Lipscomb, the influential editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, opposed such rebaptism. In 1884, Austin McGary and Elijah Hansborough started the *Firm Foundation* especially to promote the rebaptism issue. That publication became very effective, but now I am confident that both the issue and the journal are waning.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (*Heb.* 11:8). If he had waited until he saw everything clearly, he would not have left. How can we demand that others see all clearly before they begin obedience to the simplest of commands?

[For a thorough study of this subject, read RE-BAPTISM, Jimmy Allen, Howard Publishing Co., 3117 N 7th, West Monroe, LA 71291.]

HOOK'S POINTS

As we affix your name and address label to the copy you are reading, we will be thinking of you with a special wish for the Holiday Season. As we all focus on this mailout, let us consider it a greeting and sharing of love with every other reader. Let us continue to recycle God's love.

Shortly after our last mailout, Lea had a fall which impaired her sense of balance. She was unable to get out of bed or to move about unassisted. Lately, however, she is recovering enough to move about the house cautiously. I am thankful for that and also that I have been able to assist her. With my attention and energy directed to her and housekeeping, my creativity has suffered. I have difficulty keeping up with correspondence, and I have no hope of reading all the material you send me. I am sorry for that. I hope you will understand. At this stage, we might be tempted to cease our publication were it not for your kind encouragement. The subscription list is

growing fast! We are glad to have you. It is free to all who request it.

In the last two months 300 copies of *Free In Christ* have been distributed with 237 of them being sent free as gifts from you who support this ministry. Distribution has been slower lately, but I know some are accessing the books on the Web rather than purchasing them. The Web opens the books for the world to read, and we have no way of knowing how many are reading them. Your continued financial support for this ministry is a vote of confidence. You do not allow us to worry about expenses. The working fund now stands at \$3,208.49. Thank you!!

From my Web site you can now access *I Permit Not A Woman...To Remain Shackled*, by Robert Rowland, and also these five books by Carl Ketcherside: *According To The Pattern*, *In The Beginning*, *Simple Trusting Faith*, *The Death of The Custodian*, and *The Twisted Scriptures*.

While doing the laundry last week, I read some of the warnings on the washer lid. One warned, "Do not let children play in the washer." How foolish I have been, letting all the kids play in the washer! They will hate me now when I refuse to let them put each other through the spin cycle! ☹️ The warning was in English only, but to be on the safe side, perhaps it should be in ten languages like the notice in our clinic – with a footnote that translators are available for other languages also.

My family was helping me celebrate my birthday November 24. Tom and Joey were excitedly watching me opening gifts. Mira reminded that Joey, the nearly-four-year-old had made me a gift. His face brightened more and he became enthralled in anticipation of giving his gift to me. In delight he tugged at his jeans pocket to pull out an unevenly folded and crumpled sheet of paper. It was a "picture" he had drawn consisting of markings and lines and smudges of different colors of Crayola. No image or design could be detected in his proud piece of art. But it has its place on the ice box door for in his "abstract" display I see the guileless expression of childish joy derived from thoughts of pleasing his grandfather.

Surely, God is not pleased with deliberate sloppiness in our offerings. Through our gifts of masterful music, eloquent expressions, sophisticated declarations, and attention getting performances we may present our worship to the Creator of our universe. But the Infinite Artist may judge them as childish lines and smudges. His pleasure may be in seeing in our crude forms the guileless heart that finds joy in honoring him. Our technical rituals, language of religion, and "five acts of worship" may not rate high with him while joyful praise makes it to his ice box door.

Natalie Murrie reports that work is going fast in preparing Carl Ketcherside's *Mission Messenger* for the Web. Having a second set of that journal would help greatly in coordinating their work. Do you have a set, or near-complete set that you would lend them? It would be returned with no damage. Contact me, or her at <nateach@ezl.com>.

Last week a man was promoting a book on the radio which told of the effectiveness of prayer in healing. He was explaining that patients who pray, or for whom others pray, had a better healing rate. Nice. Then he went on to say that this had been tested on rats, and it was found that when they prayed for the rats, they had a better healing rate! Spare me! Christians don't need the agnostics to make more derisive skeptics. We make them ourselves by such senseless claims, by "end-times" predictions, and by fighting among ourselves.

Tim Woodroof will be leaving our pulpit in March. His plan is to devote time to his writing, publishing, and seminars. If there is an improved message heard in your congregation, it may well be due to Tim's great materials which are being used in many congregations.

What I Hear From You

"I'm through Chapter 14 of *Free In Christ*. If you want to send me a full carton of 100, I'll see that they get distributed. Thought I might even Christmas wrap them for the season!" - Tom Mackey <temackey.jn17.21@juno.com> [A man after my own heart! He plans to give the books to preachers and leaders in different segments of our Movement in Ohio. A courageous promoter of unity! Your partnership enables this.]

"One day nine years ago our preacher in Oklahoma preached a sermon on why we should not read your books. Fortunately, I was at work that day. I used to be more hot-headed and God did not want me to confront the preacher in the pulpit. I hope the preacher is not too shocked when he finds out that God read, and maybe inspired, your work. May God bless and keep you. Your work is appreciated." -Matt Hayes, Friendswood, TX.

Thank you for your books, *Free To Change* and *Free To Accept*. I have been struggling with our interpretation of some Scriptures and our legalistic attitudes in the Church of Christ, and God blessed me with your books at just the right time." -Leslie Kelly, Port Orchard, WA .

"I have just read parts of *Free In Christ* on your Web site, and, though I am not myself a Christian, I commend you for the wisdom of your writings. With so many people around the world moved to hatred, even murder, by sectarianism and what you call legalism, I am glad to hear a voice for reconciliation among Christian believers who, I am sad to say, often appear to be far too quick to condemn others, even fellow Christians, for their beliefs and practices. We have clearly forgotten that the *letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life*.

"I only hope that the same spirit of tolerance and mutual support might take hold among Muslims, Jews, Hindus,, and all others. Maybe, with your help, Christians can lead the way. Now, I personally hope that we Buddhists following the Dalai Lama will be the ones to lead mankind to wisdom and compassion, but there are a lot more Christians than Tibetan Buddhists, so I think you have a good head start, and I wish you well." -Richard Hussong, <rhussong@ultranet.com>. [If a Christian revealed this beautiful attitude, we would be quick to say he had the Spirit of Christ, which is lacking in so many of us. In a contest between ritual and attitude, this man might win. Rituals are important only as they lead us to a right relationship with God in Christ where immortality is promised. Right rituals and right attitudes, however important they may be, do not earn eternal life for us. It is the gift of God through Christ. Now, how do you feel about the next letter?]

"I am a campus minister. I graduated from LCC, Boston U., and LCU. I am about to be fired (maybe) because I did not jump up at a teen gathering on Wednesday evening and shout, 'SIN, SIN' when a few teens clapped their hands a couple of times during one song. I have also been chastised because I did not offer an invitation at the same type of 'worship service' (words of the preacher from my supervising congregation). I think you will understand why I am about to go nuts.) -Signed.

"Greetings in the loving name of Jesus. I do pray for you and family and church. I thank you very much for your nice letter. I am not happy. Why? because of storms hit my house and over areas. Water up to my house. Much of people died, here is no water, and light, no food to eat. This is time for help. It is needy dear brother tell the news to your church members for help many Christian families helpless." -Dr. J. B. M. Prasad, H. No. 11-37, Opp.S.B.I., Jaggampeta 533-435 E.G.A.P., India. [This physician-evangelist has distributed some of our books among other evangelists in India. I feel helpless in view of such need. Pray for them.]

"I would like desperately to receive your writings on the freedom knowing Christ can bring. My wife is locked in a terribly legalistic congregation and I am trying to use any Biblically based material I can find to show her how much she is missing. Any help you can provide would be appreciated greatly." -<RainbowLake@msn.com>.

"Hi! It's been a while since I've written you or heard from you. Things are absolutely wonderful. I am waiting for a chem test at 9 and then sleep. I pulled an all-nighter – something I don't recommend. It was nice though in that I had a lot of quiet time. I really had some wonderful prayer time with the Lord and was thinking about how great He is. I also thought about how much I have grown in Him. I also thought about how much my sisters and brothers in Christ have encouraged and stimulated that growth and how *Free In Christ* has totally changed my perspective on everything about God! It was after thinking this that I decided to e-mail you and tell you how much I appreciate your dedication to the Lord and for your boldness in speaking the truth – even when dedicated disciples have been against you. I really love God and give him all glory and praise for my present condition of salvation and growth. I also give you much credit (credit to whom credit is due) for my growth." -Vino <msm96a@timon.acu.edu>. [Vino, a first-year student in ACU, is miles ahead of where I was spiritually when I enrolled there in 1937. He is only one of many spiritually-minded young people among us who are already leaders.]

"A word of appreciation from a fellow Louisianan. I can concur with the 24 'discoveries' you say you have found on the pathway of life (in *Free To Change*). May God continue to bless you with His joy and peace. A fellow traveler in pursuit of Truth." <bmcjunki@iamerica.net>

"Dear Brother and Sister Hook, although it seems too slowly, the move toward freedom and acceptance in the Church of Christ can be seen in Montgomery, Alabama. Having just received the latest issue of *Freedom's Ring*, I am reminded that we should again thank you for the part your publishing ministry has contributed to this change. We pray for God to bless you in this ministry and in your daily lives." -Paul Bozeman [Thank you! Yes, the Spirit is working change, and it cannot be stopped! If WE get any credit, the WE includes all who have helped financially, all who have passed the books along to

others, all who have recommended that others read my stuff, all who encourage this ministry as many of you have done in these letters, and Vic Phares who maintains the Web site. May God bless you all.

"I just printed your latest issue from your web site for Sylvia and me, and some additional copies to share with others. Great stuff! We give the Lord all the praise and glory, and we thank you for letting Him use you to bless so many!" -Bob West, <Theophilus@CITCOM.NET> [Bob is the creator of all those popular *Theophilus* teaching cartoons.

"Well, who would have thought years ago when we were having the Bible studies that some day we could turn on our computers and see your picture. Seeing you on screen brings back memories of those studies – and many fun get-togethers. I appreciate more and more every day your insights and your courage for standing up for what is right. The church we were attending dissolved – no money to pay the building payments. We've gone to every CofC in the county and just can't hack the legalism and lack of life. So, we're now going to the Christian Church – haven't placed membership, but I imagine we will soon." -Martha Hammond, Ocala, FL.. <mham@atlantic.net> [Martha and Richard were in our study group in New Braunfels, Texas when we were working our way through new (to us) concepts of grace. A question often raised in those early times was, "Where are we going to stop?" We can never stop, for we will never comprehend all truth. No one could have foreseen from our vantage point then the liberty that we feel now. Once liberated from the shackles of traditional legalism, there is no turning back.]

Web Site: <<http://www.freedomsring.org>>

**E-mail: <hookc@teleport.com>
or <cecil@freedomsring.org>**