

# a response to “The Bible Versus the Church of Christ”

by William J. Stewart

Someone pointed me to an article claiming to expose the falsehood of the Church of Christ. Herein is my response to James L. Melton’s article, “The Bible Versus The Church of Christ.” The original Melton article was posted to [av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html](http://av1611.org/jmelton/chchurch.html), but has since been removed.

## What Is The Church?

Mr. Melton begins by quoting a single sentence from a Delton Haun tract, and concludes from it, “The Church of Christ people fail to realize that the ‘true church’ is a spiritual organism, NOT a physical organization.” The citation says no such thing. Haun acknowledged the Lord’s promise to build only one church (which He did, Matthew 16:18), and that it is identified in Scripture as His body (which it is, Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18).

This distinction which Melton makes (Haun made no such distinction, nor does the Bible) between the PHYSICAL and SPIRITUAL church seems to be Melton’s way to allow for various denominations (the PHYSICAL) to all be part of the same SPIRITUAL body. Though this is a convenient 21st century ecumenical approach to religion, it is not based on what the Bible says about the church. The Lord’s church, as we read about it in the New Testament is separated by geographical location (ie. Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Philippi, etc.), not by denominational affiliation (Baptist, Methodist, Mormon, Pentecostal, etc.).

He chides Haun for identifying the church as a “...particular group of people who believe and practice the same things...” (p. 2). Melton would have us believe the Lord is OK with the doctrinal division which exists because of denominationalism, and that each denomination is simply a part of the whole body of Christ. The apostle Paul agrees with Haun, not Melton, for he wrote to the church in Corinth,

...I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10, NKJV).

Melton’s position allows for, even encourages, doctrinal division.

Melton charges, “...these people believe that the true Church ceased to exist for about seventeen centuries, and that THEIR church has restored the true faith for today” (p. 5). However, the citation he gave from an Exum Press tract says no such thing.

ZME Science ([zmescience.com/science/archaeology/ancient-bread-roman-recipe-17032017/](http://zmescience.com/science/archaeology/ancient-bread-roman-recipe-17032017/)) provides a recipe for a 2,000-year-old Egyptian bread. If we follow the same recipe today, we will end up with the same style of bread. There are a variety of bread styles in the world today, but if you want an authentic loaf of first century Egyptian bread—you need to follow the right recipe. The same is true with the church. There are all kinds of different churches today. Why are they different? They are using different recipes (doctrines & practices). If we want to be the church that Jesus built, we need to follow His recipe (the doctrine & practices that are revealed in the New Testament).

I have no doubt the true church has continued to exist since the day Jesus started it. Wesley, Luther, Knox, and Whitfield were not part of the true church, not because it didn’t exist in their day, but because they

believed, taught and practiced things contrary to sound doctrine. They didn't follow Jesus' pattern for the church.

Melton writes, "If you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then you are a member of the true church, no matter WHAT denomination you are associated with..." (p. 6). Again, Melton discounts the importance of believing and doing what Jesus says; doctrine and practice are unimportant factors in his mind, so long as you believe you have "received Jesus Christ." This would be like saying, "If you believe fitness is important, then you are a member of the YMCA, no matter what gym (Fit4Less, GoodLife Fitness, Planet Fitness, etc.) you are associated with." It doesn't work that way. The Baptist church is no more part of the true church than Fit4Less is part of the YMCA. They are distinct organizations. They may have many similarities, but that doesn't make them the same organization or one part of the other.

If one wants to be a part of the church Jesus built, they need to forsake the denominational mindset that is prevalent in today's religious world and meet and worship with those who are teaching and doing what Jesus commanded, not what Wesley, Luther, Knox, Whitfield, or other influential religious leaders have taught and practiced.

## **The Church Name**

Mr. Melton makes two false statements in his opening sentence to this section. He wrote: "The Church of Christ claims to reserve for itself the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church, although the term 'church of Christ' is found nowhere in the Bible."

I don't know of anyone who would affirm that "Church of Christ" is the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church. The Lord's church is referred to a few different ways in the New Testament: "the Way" (Acts 19:9, 23), "church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2), "house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15), "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14-15), etc.. I believe any of these—any description used in the Bible—would be scriptural to use. Why then do we use "Church of Christ"? I cannot speak for all Churches of Christ in the world, but I can speak for the local church. Years ago, when this congregation began to meet together, we considered using "Church of God" on our signs and in our advertising. We decided against it because "Church of God" is used by adherents to Armstrongism and some Pentecostal churches, and we wanted to avoid being confused with them. Also, when Christians from other areas are in Kingston and are looking for a place to worship, they will likely be looking for a place which identifies itself as "Church of Christ." Having said that, we do not believe, nor do I know of anyone among the churches of Christ who does believe that "Church of Christ" is the ONLY scriptural name for a New Testament church.

In fact, the idea of the church having or needing a formal name is not consistent with what we see in the New Testament. As mentioned above, these are descriptions (the church belonging to Christ, the church belonging to God, the household of God, the kingdom of God, the temple, the body of Christ, the flock of God, the bride of Christ, etc.). They are not formal names. Consider an illustration. What is the name of the moon? Don't say moon—that's not a name, that's a description. We haven't given our moon a name. Why not? Because there is only one. It doesn't need a name to distinguish it from other moons, for we only have one moon. We distinguish the planets by name (Earth, Saturn, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Venus, Uranus, Neptune) because there are several of them. We can't just say "the planet" and expect someone to know which planet we are referring to. But, if we say, "the moon," everyone knows what we are talking about. In the early centuries, if someone spoke of "the church," they knew exactly what was being spoken about. It

is a modern thing (since the Protestant Reformation) to have to distinguish between this church or that church. It is a denominational thing. It's grounded in religious division due to differences in doctrine and practice.

The author said, "the term 'church of Christ' is found nowhere in the Bible." Either (1) he has not read the book of Romans all the way through, (2) he has, but didn't do so very carefully, or (3) he is banking on the ignorance of his readers and hoping they will accept him at his word. Romans 16:16 reads, "Salute one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you."

Melton scoffs at the idea that since the church belongs to Christ we believe it should be called after His name. He identifies such as "the result of human reasoning, not Bible study." Let me be blunt. There is more Bible study involved in concluding we should glorify Christ in the "name" (description) we use for the church than there is in calling a church "Baptist," "Presbyterian," "Free Methodist," etc.. These names are nothing but the product of human reasoning and doctrinal division.

Years ago, I studied with a woman by the name of Sue. She was adamant that it didn't matter what the church was called, that names really don't matter. So, I started calling her "Bob." As we continued to study, I kept calling her "Bob." She was visibly annoyed with me. Why? What was the problem? She got my point—names do matter. If a man and woman get married, it is custom that the woman takes the man's last name. All you fellas out there, what would you think if your wife took your neighbour's last name instead? Names matter. The bride of Christ should wear His name.

## Music In Worship Service

The author quotes from a Dub McClish publication which cites Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, and then calls upon the reader to notice that worship in song is an activity "which all assembled worshippers are to be involved in." Mr. Melton then emphatically tells us Paul's instruction pertains to "PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST, not worship services," and charges McClish and others of taking the texts out of context. We can do an extensive study on the context of both verses in a separate study, if anyone desires to do so, but let me point out two words that appear in the texts which reveal this is not about an individual worshiper engaged in private worship. The words are "one another." Notice:

- "Speaking to **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19)
- "Submitting to **one another** in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21)
- "Do not lie to **one another**" (Colossians 3:9)
- "Bearing with **one another**, and forgiving **one another**" (Colossians 3:13)
- "Teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16)

Anything that is done to or with **one another** is not a personal, private, individual thing. Are these texts necessarily about a public worship service? No, I don't think that can be established. But, that is beside the point. What do the texts reveal about worship in song? Melton confidently declares, "Neither chapter forbids musical instruments." He's right. Neither text says, "Thou shall not use instrumental music in worship." In fact, there is no New Testament text which condemns the use of instrumental music in worship. So, why do we not use instrumental music in worship? Why do we believe it is wrong to use instrumental music in worship?

Melton derides L.R. Wilson's statement, "...we are not governed by what He did not forbid, but by what He has authorized" (p. 3). He calls this "unscriptural logic." Really? If we read just one verse further in Colossians 3, we find this:

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (v 17)

That sure sounds like the Lord expects us to have authority for what we do.

The author states, "There are MANY things that are used in worship services that are not specifically authorized." He mentions hymnals, microphones, and pitch pipes. There are a host of things we could add to the list: seats, a pulpit, PowerPoint presentations, communion trays, etc.. How can we use these things, if God has not specifically authorized them? We need to understand the difference between specific and generic authority. I'll use a couple Old Testament examples to illustrate. God commissioned Noah to build an ark of Gopher wood (Genesis 6). The Lord didn't say, "Don't use Spruce..." (Pine, Poplar, Ash, etc..). When He told him what kind of wood to use, that excluded every other kind. Where was he to get the Gopher wood from? It didn't matter. God didn't specify, and so Noah was free to gather it from the hill side or the valley, from 2 miles away or 20 miles away. The Lord also gave Noah the dimensions of the ark, and commanded that there be three levels. He couldn't build it with four levels. God specifically authorized three levels. However, the height of each level was left to Noah's discretion. God had not specified. The number of levels was specifically authorized, variant heights of the levels was generically authorized.

Consider another example—Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). These two sons of Aaron were excited to burn incense before the Lord. No specific instructions are given in the Law about how to fashion the censers. Something was needed to burn the incense in, so they were generically authorized. The composition of the incense was specifically authorized (Exodus 30:35-38), and so they could use no other incense in the tabernacle than what God had commanded. The censers and incense were fine, the problem in Leviticus 10 was the fire they used. We are told "...they offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them." I don't believe these eager priests went to a local dump or pagan temple to get fire. We don't know where they got the fire from, but the indication is they wanted to worship God and they thought the fire they selected would be fine. It was not. Leviticus 16:12 tells us the fire was to come from "...the altar before the LORD..." We don't know where they got their fire from, but it was not the fire which God authorized, and because of that, they perished before the Lord.

So, what does all this have to do with using instruments or not? In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, a specific type of music is authorized—singing. The Lord doesn't have to tell us not to use instruments any more than He had to tell Moses not to use Maple trees. Search through the New Testament, and you will not find a single verse authorizing the use of instrumental music in worship. What you will find is multiple references to singing. If we are going to "...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Colossians 3:17), then we are going to sing (Colossians 3:16), not play instruments in worship. Still don't think it's a big deal? Ask Nadab and Abihu if it matters whether we do what God authorized or not.

What about the hymnals, microphones, pitch pipes, etc.? We don't have specific authority for these. They are all in the realm of generic authority; they are expedients to help us obey the command to sing. We can sing words that we have memorized, we can sing words projected on a wall, we can sing words that are recorded in a hymnal. None of these alter the nature of our worship—it is still singing. The same is true with the microphone and the pitch pipe. They will amplify the sound and make sure we start on the right note, but they do not change the nature of what we are doing—it is still singing. However, instrumental music is

a different kind of music. It is not an expedience. It doesn't help us to sing, it is something in addition to our singing. It is a different kind of music being added to (or in some cases replacing) singing.

Melton gives a list of verses to prove "the Lord loves good music of praise and worship, and this DOES include musical instruments." The list consists of six Old Testament texts and three from the book of Revelation. We can no more use Old Testament texts to justify using instrumental music in worship than we can use it to justify enforcing a tithe, the Sabbath laws, or the requirements of animal sacrifices. The Old Law is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). The texts from Revelation speak about harps being used in heaven. Is it about praise? Yes. Is it authority to use instrumental music in our assemblies on earth? If it is, then what it authorizes is harps, not pianos, drums, guitars, keyboards, etc.. But the harps are a figure, just like the bowls of incense (5:8). The bowls of incense represent the prayers of the saints. We must be careful not to misuse symbolic language in Revelation to justify what the Lord has not authorized.

## **The Lord's Supper**

"The Church of Christ places far too much emphasis on the Lord's Supper." That is Melton's opening statement on this topic. I disagree with his statement, but I congratulate him on finding the most over-the-top quote he could to support his statement. He cites a Fred Gardner pamphlet which basically makes a linear relationship between "fidelity to" the Lord's Supper and a Christian's focus on our first love and doing the first works (Revelation 2:4-5). Melton retorts, "Revelation 2:4-5 say nothing—ABSOLUTELY NOTHING—about the Lord's Supper." He's right. But, may I also point out, Revelation 2:4-5 also say nothing—ABSOLUTELY NOTHING—about prayer, praise, reading the Bible, kindness, compassion, etc.. Are such things also unimportant and unrelated to faithfulness as a Christian? What proves too much proves nothing at all.

Is there a connection between observing the Lord's Supper and faithfulness to the Lord? Certainly. Is it a linear connection? No. As Melton says, "...you can observe the Lord's Supper fifty-two weeks a year, but if you haven't been born again then your lost and going to Hell, and if your sins aren't being confessed to the Lord regularly, then you are OUT of fellowship with Him, in spite of your faithfulness to the Lord's Supper." Amen! But that doesn't make the Lord's Supper unimportant. It is a memorial of the death of our Lord. By participating in it, Paul says, "you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Each year on November 11, there are events throughout Canada honouring the memory of the armed forces members who died in the line of duty. Why do we do this? Lest we forget. The degree of reflection one gives is far greater if the effort is made to attend a Remembrance Day ceremony over simply pausing for a minute wherever you are at 11:00 a.m.. The ceremony is designed to stress remembrance. The same is true of the Lord's Supper. It is an occasion specifically designed to provoke contemplation and reflection. Does partaking of the Lord's Supper guarantee salvation? Of course not. Does it help focus our minds upon the Christ and the price paid for our salvation? Absolutely.

Melton misrepresents Gardner's statement, inferring that the latter said we must visualize the body and blood of Christ "in order to stay in fellowship with Him" (p. 3). The Gardner quote may exaggerate the relationship of the Lord's Supper with faithfulness, but he certainly did not say "our fellowship with Christ is based on visualizing His body and blood."

How often should we observe the Lord's Supper? Melton is right, neither Matthew 26:26-28 nor 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 say how often. He states we are free to choose how often we partake of the Lord's Supper based on Paul's saying "as often as" in 1 Corinthians 11:26.

A George Baily quote identifies Acts 20:7 as the basis for the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Melton accuses Baily and any who agree with him of "perverting the scriptures." He adamantly states of Acts 20:7, "He said that they came together to BREAK BREAD, not to observe the Lord's Supper. Mr. Baily wants you to think the two are the same, but they are NOT the same." Breaking bread can certainly refer to a common meal (Acts 2:46; 20:11), but Paul used the same terminology in 1 Corinthians 11 to speak about Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper. Notice, "...the Lord Jesus on 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; do this in remembrance of Me.'" Breaking bread can be a common meal, but it is not exclusively so. It is likely in Acts 20 that the Christians both partook of the Lord's Supper (v 7) and shared a common meal (v 11). Lest it be thought that only "Church of Christ people" think this is a reference to the Lord's Supper, several commentators (Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, John Wesley, Matthew Henry, B.W. Johnson, A.T. Robertson, etc.) also conclude Acts 20:7 is about the Lord's Supper. In fact, Johnson claims "...the early church writers from Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, to Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian, all with one consent, declare that the church observed the first day of the week. They are equally agreed that the Lord's Supper was observed weekly, on the first day of the week" (People's New Testament Commentary).

Regarding frequency, a parallel can be made between Luke's statement in Acts 20:7 and the command to the Hebrews about the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8). The Law didn't say "Remember every Sabbath day..." It didn't need to. Every Sabbath is necessarily implied, for every week has a Sabbath (7th day). The Jews understood that. When Acts 20:7 speaks about the practice of breaking bread (cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24), it does not have to state "every first day," since every week has a first day. Can we not see the necessary implication? But, whether someone is convinced that Acts 20:7 speaks of a weekly observation of the Lord's Supper or not, on what basis would someone oppose a weekly remembrance of the Lord's death surely keeping before our minds what the Lord has done for us cannot be characterized as bad. Does Melton contend that it is unscriptural to observe the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis? If not, I fail to understand his hostility over the issue.

## **Resurrections and Judgments**

Melton calls the idea of "a GENERAL resurrection and judgment" for all mankind a "perversion of truth." Has Melton never read John 5? Notice what the Lord said:

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29).

If that's not "a GENERAL resurrection and judgment" I'm not sure what it is. Jesus said ALL will be resurrected, both the good and the evil, and they will ALL receive either eternal life or condemnation.

In his next few paragraphs, Melton mentions the 1000-year reign almost a dozen times. He states, "True Bible-believers take the Pre-Millennial view, which is the correct view, according to the word of God." I'd be delighted to discuss the pre-millennial theory at length with anyone who wants to do so. But, let me state

this—Revelation 1:1 says the message has been “...sent and signified...” One must understand the figures and images we encounter in Revelation are signs and symbols. They are not to be taken literally. When we read about strange creatures in the book, when events happen, when numbers are used—they are not literal, they are signs. It is faulty to look for literal fulfillments of what has been symbolically presented. The Jehovah’s Witnesses believe only 144,000 people will go to heaven, because they have taken the number given in Revelation 7:4 & 14:2 literally. And yet they fail to take the rest of the details about the 144,000 literally (male, Jewish, virgins). Those who take the pre-millennial position are guilty of the same. They make the 1000-years of Revelation 20 literal, and either ignore or misrepresent what the rest of the Bible says about the reign of Christ in favour of their doctrine.

Speaking before a crowd in His day, Jesus plainly revealed when His reign would begin. He said, “...there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9:1). His reign would not begin two millennia or more in the future, but would begin in the first century (see Acts 2:30-36; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 10:12-13). If the reign of Christ was a literal 1000-years, then it would have ceased in the 11th century (ie. 1030 AD), since according to Jesus, Peter and Paul, the Lord began to reign in the 1st century (ie. 30 AD).

Melton cites a Grover Stevens publication, The Rapture, Tribulation, and Pre-Millennialism, which states “the day of the Lord” in 2 Peter 3:10 is “the day of his coming.” Immediately the accusations fly. Mr. Stevens is “perverting 2 Peter 3:9-10.” Mr. Stevens “IGNORES verse 8 and quotes verse 9 and 10 OUT OF CONTEXT.” Melton explains to us why brother Stevens “ignored” verse 8, it is “because verse 8 INCLUDES the 1000-year reign!!” Does it? The verse reads:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:8)

Seriously? Melton thinks this is a reference to the 1000-year reign of Christ? True, the phrase “thousand years” is found, but that doesn’t make it a reference to the millennial reign of Christ. If so, does that mean that Psalm 90:4 and Ecclesiastes 6:6 are also references to the millennial reign? Foolishness!

It is Melton who has ignored the context! Let’s summarize it briefly. Scoffers will come in the last days (v 3, cf. Hebrews 1:2), who will mock the idea that Jesus is returning (v 4) for judgment (v 7), claiming that “all things continue as they were from the beginning.” Peter says they “willfully forget” (v 5) about the judgment (v 6) which came in Noah’s day by the flood. The final judgment, which involves the destruction of the heavens and earth, is coming (v 7, cf. v 10-12).

Verse 8 is not about the 1000-year reign of Christ. If that were the case, what’s the point of comparing it to “one day”? If it is a literal 1000 years, then it is not one day. Nowhere in the Bible is the 1000-year reign compared to or referred to as “one day.” So, what is Peter’s point? The apostle is alluding to Psalm 90:4, “...a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.” The scoffers of his day may have objected, “It’s been 40 years—he’s not coming.” Scoffers today might contend, “It’s been 1987 years—he’s not coming.” They mock because it’s taking too long. They jeer because they don’t believe it’s going to happen. Peter’s retort—time is nothing before the Lord. We are subject to days and years and centuries and millennia—the Lord is not bound by the clock or the calendar. The final judgment will come when it comes, when the Lord deems the time right. God will not fail to keep His promised judgment (v 9), but is patiently waiting for people to turn to Him.

What does Melton do with 2 Peter 3:8? He says, “one day is as a THOUSAND YEARS in God’s eyes, so the ‘day of the Lord’ can very well INCLUDE the 1000-year reign!” To make room for his premillennial theory,

Melton ignores the contextual meaning of 2 Peter 3:8, and conveniently redefines the “day.” The Bible doesn’t speak of the 1000-year reign as “one day” that lasts for 1000 years.

Melton disparagingly infers that Revelation 20:5 “is NEVER quoted by the Church of Christ.” Overstatements and lies are not becoming. The discussion of the first resurrection spans Revelation 20:4-6. The first resurrection is not a literal resurrection, as Melton believes. It is a figure used to refer to spiritual life (John 5:24-25; 11:26; Ephesians 2:1-5; 5:14; Colossians 2:13). Those who obey the Lord have received the first resurrection. Revelation 20:6 says the second death (eternal destruction, hell) has no power over them. However, Revelation 20:5 says the rest of the dead (spiritually dead) are not raised, that is, they do not have spiritual life. They have no part in the first resurrection which is affected by obedience to the gospel.

Melton ends this topic with one final accusation, “...the Church of Christ OMITTS the Millennium altogether, making the First Resurrection and the Second Death one and the same.” Absolutely not! The first resurrection is about rising to “newness of life” (Romans 6:3-5), it is a reference to spiritual life. The second death is the condemnation that will come to the wicked at the final judgment. They most certainly are not the same thing.

## **Water Baptism and Salvation**

Mr. Melton rejects the necessity of baptism for one to be saved, and in fact identifies it as an “ancient pagan belief.” How sad that he not only discounts the truth, but he calls what is specifically commanded in the Bible pagan.

The thief on the cross is the common battle cry of those who oppose the necessity of baptism. Melton is no different. He confidently exclaims, “...the thief on the cross was saved WITHOUT BEING BAPTIZED (Lk. 23:42-43).” Agreed. I can find no text saying he was ever baptized; but the opposite is true as well—Melton can find no support to affirm he was not baptized. The Bible simply doesn’t say. And it doesn’t matter, because the thief is not an example of how to be saved in obedience to the gospel of Christ. Since the thief died after Jesus on the day they were crucified, Melton says, “the thief died in THIS PRESENT AGE,” and therefore was subject to the terms of pardon in the Christian age. The church didn’t begin immediately upon His death. After His resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days preparing the apostles (Acts 1:1-8). At the end of the forty days, He would commission them to preach the gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48), and still, they were restrained from doing so for another 10 days, until the day of Pentecost had come, when they would receive the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4). And on that day, Peter and the others used the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19), the gospel message, and 3,000 souls responded and were added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47).

Melton tells us “The terms of pardon were made very clear a long time before Acts 2.” Amen! However, the only term of pardon Melton lists is BELIEVING on Christ. Must one believe? Absolutely. Will faith alone save? Go ask James (James 2:14-26). In John 3:5, Jesus said, “...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” That, my friend, is a reference to baptism. Melton denies such, saying “the water in John 3:5 has nothing to do with water baptism.” Unfortunately, he failed to tell us what the water refers to. John 3:5 is parallel to Titus 3:5 and Hebrews 10:22, each picturing water as being necessary in salvation. If the water is not baptism, what is it? It is Melton, not Jesus who excludes baptism as a term of pardon in the gospels.



Melton wrote, “Church of Christ members are taught that there is only ONE kind of baptism: WATER baptism.” That’s either an honest misrepresentation or an outright lie. I’m not sure which. Either way, it is not true. The New Testament speaks about several different baptisms: the baptisms or washings among the Jews, John’s baptism, Holy Spirit baptism, baptism into Christ, baptism of fire, baptism of Moses, baptism of suffering. Some of those involve water, some do not. That said, Paul wrote, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” (Ephesians 4:4-5). The apostle is not denying the existence of the different baptisms listed; but he is saying only one of them is active and valid. So, which is it?

Melton writes, “There is one baptism which is far more important than water baptism, and this baptism is the SPIRIT baptism that the new Christian receives when he receives Christ as Saviour.” I’d be happy to sit and discuss what the Bible says about Holy Spirit baptism with anyone who is willing to do so. But let me simply point out, Paul said there is “one baptism,” Melton affirms two baptisms with his statement. Every believer receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but Melton has mistakenly equated the baptism of the Spirit with the indwelling. They are not the same. If you search the Bible, you will find the baptism of the Spirit was very, very limited.

Whether reading the Bible or any other document, we need to understand words according to their common use, unless something in the context demands otherwise. The word baptize (Gr. baptizo) means to immerse or submerge. Melton correctly states that one might be immersed in anything (fire, water, Holy Spirit). However, the common use of the word is to immerse in water. Over half of the references to baptism in the Bible specifically mention water in the context. And several others, though not specifically referencing water, infer water. The common use of the word baptize involves water. Melton tells us that Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3-4 are NOT referring to water baptism. Why not? Not because the context demands something other than the common use of the word? No. It is because Melton rejects the necessity of water baptism.

Melton has plenty more material to respond to on baptism and salvation. In fact, about half of his entire 9-page article against the churches of Christ focuses on baptism. The last several pages of his article are attempts to refute what he identifies as “proof texts” used by the Church of Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:3-4 & Galatians 3:27). We will respond to his arguments on each of these in detail.

## **Water Baptism, Mark 16:16**

Melton points his readers to what he calls “proof texts” used by the Church of Christ and seeks to demonstrate they do not say baptism is essential for salvation. The first text he addresses is Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” His charge? We are “taking verses out of context and IGNORING the rest of the Bible.” How have we taken Mark 16:16 out of context? Apparently because we don’t “...cast out demons ... speak with new tongues ... take up serpents ... drink anything deadly ... lay hands on the sick...” (verses 17-18). First, whether we are doing the things listed in verses 17-18 or not doesn’t change what Jesus said in verse 16. Jesus still said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” How exactly is the truth of the statement modified by verses 17-18 to mean something other than what it says? Second, one needs to understand the Biblical purpose and duration of these signs and wonders. Jesus said they are signs that would follow those who believe, and we can find a record of most of these things in the book of

Acts. However, the question is, would these things “follow those who believe” indefinitely? Or would there be an end to these miraculous signs? We do not have the space to deal with the topic at length here, but I will simply say the Bible reveals the miraculous gifts were given to confirm the word that was spoken (Hebrews 2:1-4), and they would end when the complete revelation of God’s word was given (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). I am happy to discuss this at length with anyone who wants to sit and look at it together. But again, be clear, nothing in verses 17-18 change the meaning of verse 16. Jesus still said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Melton states Mark 16:16 “...certainly does not teach ‘faith plus baptism equals salvation!’” The word “and” is a conjunction. It joins two things together. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich requires both peanut butter and jelly (unless Melton made the sandwich; then it only has peanut butter). But if it only has peanut butter, then it’s not a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, is it? By rejecting the necessity of baptism from the phrase “believes and is baptized,” Melton is effectively saying the text should read, “He who believes will be saved.” Of course that is what Melton believes, but the problem is, that is not what Jesus said. Seems that Melton is the one who is IGNORING what the Bible says.

Melton writes, “One is damned for NOT BELIEVING. No one is damned for not being baptized.” His point, Jesus did not condemn the unbaptized, therefore, one can be saved without being baptized. Friend, unbelievers are not going to be baptized; but those who believe what Jesus said will be baptized. Consider a parallel statement: “He who eats and digests will live; he who does not eat will die.” Digestion follows naturally after eating. If one does not eat, they cannot digest. To speak of the imminent death of those who do not digest (since they did not eat) would be redundant. Baptism naturally follows after faith. Jesus linked them together (“believes and is baptized”). If one does not believe, they will not be baptized. To speak of the condemnation of those who are not baptized (because they did not believe) would be redundant.

A common ploy of those who reject the necessity of baptism is to focus on the large number of verses that mention the necessity of faith. Melton does the same. He lists John 1:12; 3:15-18, 36; 5:24; 6:47; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:9; 1 Peter 2:6; and John 11:25-26. After citing these texts, he writes, “...who in their right mind would choose to IGNORE these plain and simple Salvation verses by charging to Mark 16:16 and trying to confuse matters?” What?? Who is ignoring these texts on the necessity of faith? I believe them. All of them. But one must wonder whether Melton believes what Mark 16:16 says or not. How about we take all that the Bible says about salvation? Is faith necessary? Yes, there are a myriad of verses that speak of the necessity of faith. Is baptism necessary? Yes, there are several verses (Mark 16:16 included) that speak of the necessity of baptism.

Melton concludes his denial of what Jesus said in Mark 16:16 with the following: “The key element in one’s Salvation is his BELIEF ON CHRIST ALONE. Water baptism is important, and it should always FOLLOW Salvation as a picture of the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ, but it cannot save anyone.” Melton says that faith only results in salvation. The phrase “faith only” appears just one time in the Bible. It’s in James 2:24, where the Spirit inspired writer penned, “...not by faith only.” Melton says baptism is important, but that it FOLLOWS salvation. Friend, open your Bible to Mark 16:16. Put your finger on the word “saved.” What did Jesus put before salvation? Was it belief only, or was it belief and baptism?

## **Water Baptism, Acts 2:38**

Acts 2:38 reads, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Those who teach salvation by faith only say the word “for” in Acts 2:38 means “because of.” Mr. Melton cites a Delton Haun tract which states “for” is rendered “in order to” or “unto” in some translations. Melton very quickly notes “...how the Church of Christ must refer to OTHER TRANSLATIONS in order to find support for their false teachings!” Melton, a staunch KJV only advocate, affirms, “We will stick with the Book that God uses, the King James Bible.” The KJV came over 1,500 years after the original transmission of God’s word. It was not the first translation of Scripture into another language, nor is it the first English translation of the Bible. I know that King James authorized the King James Version, but where has God ever stated that the KJV exclusively is His word in the English language? Since it is a side issue, we’ll not take the time to address the fallacy of the KJV only position here, but I am happy to sit down and study with anyone who wants to dig into it further.

Returning to the discussion of Acts 2:38, Melton says, “...the term ‘for’ does not always mean ‘in order to’...” He gives Luke 5:14 as an example, where Jesus healed a leper and told him to go offer a sacrifice “for your cleansing.” The sacrifice was not in order to be cleansed, but because he’d already been cleansed. From this, Melton concludes: “the word ‘for’ sometimes means ‘because of.’” This would be a great example, if the same Greek word was used in both texts. The Greek word rendered “for: in Luke 5:14 is *peri*; the word rendered “for” in Acts 2:38 is *eis*. Allow me to give an example that uses the same word, but not just the same work, the same phrase in the Greek.

Matthew 26:28 reads, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” The Lord’s blood was shed “for the remission of sins” (*eis aphesis hamartia*). Will Melton or anyone else affirm that Jesus blood was shed BECAUSE we already had the remission of sins? Everyone understands His blood was shed UNTO the remission of sins. Peter says we are baptized “for the remission of sins” (*eis aphesis hamartia*). There is no valid reason to make the phrase mean something different in Acts 2:38 than what it means in Matthew 26:28.

Melton tells us “At the time of Acts 2:38, Peter didn’t fully understand Salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).” I’m not sure what to make of that statement. Is Melton conceding that Acts 2:38 teaches baptism for the forgiveness of sins, but saying Peter was wrong? Jesus promised Peter and the other apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). That being the case, it’s hard to believe that Peter would teach something erroneous in Acts 2:38, as Melton suggests. He points to Acts 15:11 as evidence that Peter spoke something very different, that he no longer taught baptism for the forgiveness of sins. He quotes Peter as saying “...through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved...” Friend, that is the epitome of dishonesty. Melton uses an ellipsis (...) to change the meaning of Peter’s statement. Here is the entire sentence: “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” Who are “they”? A look at the context of Acts 15 shows it is a discussion about whether the Gentiles were subject to Moses’ Law. Peter said that “we” (the Jews) shall be saved in the same manner as “they” (the Gentiles). Neither Jew nor Gentile were subject to Moses’ Law; both were to obey the gospel of Christ. That is—there is only one gospel, and one plan to save people, whether Jew or Gentile, and it had nothing to do with adherence to the Mosaic law. Peter’s statement in Acts 15:11 does not negate the necessity of baptism which he taught in Acts 2:38. In fact, this same apostle would eventually write 1 Peter 3:21 (go take a peek).

Melton correctly states “there are NO GENTILES in Acts 2:38.” Somehow, this leads him to believe that Acts 2 was “a NATIONAL situation concerning Israel, not an individual situation dealing with lost sinners.” Yet,

in the same paragraph he tells us they were told how to be saved in verse 21, "...whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." The "whoever" of verse 21 makes this an INDIVIDUAL, not a NATIONAL thing. How does one call on the name of the Lord? Mr. Melton didn't tell us. In Acts 22:16, Ananias urged Saul of Tarsus to become a Christian. Notice what he said: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Ananias, who was commissioned by the Lord to teach Saul (Acts 9:10-18), associated baptism with calling on the name of the Lord.

Melton confidently affirms, "No one in the chapter asks how to be saved." He is careful to note the question in verse 37 was "what shall we do?" not "What must I do to be saved?" Semantics! In response to their inquiry, Peter said they needed to repent and be baptized. Since he doesn't like the answer, Melton refuses to believe the question had anything to do with salvation.

However, he does point us to Acts 16:31 for "the answer to THAT question." OK, let's go check it out. In Acts 16, there is a jailer in Philippi who is charged with keeping Paul and Silas secure. He fell asleep on the job, an earthquake happened which opened the doors and loosed their chains. When he woke up, he figured the prisoners had fled, and drew his sword to kill himself. Paul called out to stop him, for all the prisoners were accounted for. It is at this point the man asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). In verse 31, he was told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Melton wants you to stop there. May I encourage you to keep reading? Verse 32, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." This man didn't know who Jesus was—he was a Gentile jailer in Philippi. He needed to be taught. Verse 33, "And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized." Having learned about who Jesus was, the jailer did two things: 1) he washed their stripes (repentance, he was sorry for the role he had in their suffering), and 2) he was baptized. He did the same thing that Peter told the crowd in Acts 2 to do, repent and be baptized. Could it be that he heard the same message from Paul and Silas that the Jerusalem crowd heard from Peter?

Mr. Melton says, "WE were told to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in Matthew 28:19," and sets that against the baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" in Acts 2:38. His conclusion? The latter is "obviously a special baptism for the first century Jews who had rejected Christ. They were told to be baptized in His name to show that they now RECEIVED Him." Melton's argument is nothing more than posturing. It is wild, baseless speculation to mislead the reader. Perhaps it would be helpful to acknowledge what "in the name of" means. It's not that difficult. A police officer cries out, "Stop, in the name of the law." He just cited his authority. James 5:10 speaks about the prophets "who spoke in the name of the Lord." Colossians 3:17 reads, "...whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." It is a statement of authority. For more examples, look at Acts 4:7; 5:40; 1 Corinthians 5:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:6. Melton tries to make a WE (Gentiles) vs THEY (Jews) contrast between Matthew 28:19 and Acts 2:38. No such contrast exists. Whether one is baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) or "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38) or "in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48) or "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5) doesn't matter. The key is the acknowledgement of the authority of God. It is not about a baptismal formula to be recited, but an authority to be acknowledged.

Again, Melton sets God's word against itself. This time, Acts 2:38 and Acts 10:44. He acknowledges in Acts 2 the Jews received the Holy Spirit AFTER they were baptized. He then jubilantly explains why the Spirit came upon the believing Gentiles BEFORE baptism in Acts 10. Melton poses the question: "Why didn't Peter tell the Gentiles in Acts 10:44 the same thing that he told the Jews in Acts 2:38? Answer: GOD DIDN'T

GIVE HIM A CHANCE! God went ahead and sent the Holy Spirit before anything was said about baptism, because He didn't want anyone confusing baptism with Salvation." It's sad that Melton wants us to believe that Peter, who was under the direction of the Holy Spirit, was actually working against God, and that God had to thwart the preacher before he said anything about baptism. What a sad and absolutely inaccurate explanation of what occurred in Acts 10.

The conversion of Cornelius and his family was special. This was the first time the gospel was preached to the Gentiles. Some miraculous things took place in order to bring it to fruition. Had the angel not appeared to Cornelius (Acts 10:3-6), he would never have known he wasn't serving God faithfully, nor would he have known to send for Peter. Had Peter not fallen into a trance and received the vision of the sheet let down from heaven (Acts 10:10-16), he'd not have learned at that time the Gentiles were not unclean (Acts 10:28, 34-35), and he would not have gone to Cornelius' house. Had the Spirit not spoken to Peter and told him to go with them men at his door (Acts 10:19- 20), his doubts may have caused him to refuse. The vision dealt with animals, not people, and Peter was still mulling over the meaning of it in his mind (Acts 10:17, 28). And had the Spirit not fallen upon the Gentiles, those who went with Peter (Acts 10:23, 45), who did not see the angel that appeared to Cornelius, nor the vision of the sheet seen by Peter, nor heard the voice of the Spirit which commanded Peter, may have remained in doubt whether the Gentiles truly could receive the gospel or not. The Spirit falling upon the Gentiles "astonished" those of the circumcision who believed, and now, they would be witnesses to the fact that God had received the Gentiles. It wasn't just Peter's word. Take any of these miraculous events away from Acts 10, and the gospel either doesn't go to the Gentiles, or there is a huge cloud of doubt concerning it.

Melton would like us to believe that the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles in Acts 10 is evidence they were saved before being baptized. Again, the text reveals the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit upon Cornelius' household. It was not given to confirm that the Gentiles were already saved, it was given to convict the mind of the Jews who were present, so they would not stand in the way of the Gentiles receiving salvation. What the Gentiles received in Acts 10 was a miraculous measure of the Spirit, not the indwelling of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit is given to those who have obeyed the gospel (Acts 5:32; Ephesians 1:13-14). Speaking in tongues is not evidence of salvation, as some assume. That is a common charismatic doctrine. Will Melton join the Pentecostals in affirming that we must speak in tongues to demonstrate we are saved? In Numbers 22:28, "...the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she..." spoke. God's Spirit fell upon Balaam's donkey, and it spoke in tongues! Does that mean it was a Christian donkey? Speaking in tongues is not necessarily proof of salvation.

Though there are some unique things in the conversion account in Acts 10, it still fits the pattern found elsewhere in the book of Acts. The gospel was preached to them, they believed it, and they responded in faithful obedience. In Acts 10:6, the angel to Cornelius that Peter "will tell you what you must do." What did Peter tell Cornelius to do? The same thing he told the Jewish crowd at Pentecost, "...he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48).

## **Water Baptism, Acts 22:16**

Acts 22:16 reads, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

After quoting the text, Mr. Melton immediately states: “Revelation 1:5 plainly tells us that it is the BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST that washes away sin, not water baptism, so there is obviously more to Acts 22:16 than the Church of Christ teaches.” To be clear, Revelation 1:5 says the Lord’s blood washes away sin; it says nothing about baptism, either positive or negative. Melton’s inference is that Acts 22:16 is somehow unclear or ambiguous. It is not. Acts 22:16 is as plain and easy to understand as Revelation 1:5. The problem is, Melton believes one, but does not believe the other.

So, what does he do? He maligns Ananias, the speaker in Acts 22. Using Acts 22:12, Melton identifies Ananias as “...a Jewish proselyte who still followed the Old Testament law...” who “...did not yet have full understanding of Salvation by Grace.” He continues, “Ananias associated water baptism with the Old Testament laws of PURIFICATION ... He didn’t have a clear understanding of the Blood Atonement of Christ, which washes away all sin.”

Consider a few things:

1. Acts 22 does not, nor does any other text identify Ananias as a Jewish proselyte. Melton just made that up. Acts 9:10 identifies Ananias as “...a certain disciple at Damascus...”
2. The Lord spoke to and commissioned Ananias to speak to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-18). Did Jesus choose to send someone who would fail to teach the truth of the gospel?
3. Melton’s accusation against Ananias is the same as his accusation against Peter in Acts 2:38, he “...did not yet have a full understanding of Salvation by Grace.” And yet, Peter, many years after Acts 2:38 was still teaching the necessity of water baptism (1 Peter 3:21).
4. When falsehood is found among God’s people in the New Testament, it is corrected. In Acts 8, Simon’s attempt to buy the ability to impart the gifts of the Spirit was rebuked. In Acts 15, the Judaizing teachers who sought to bind the Law on the Gentiles were confronted and refuted. In Acts 18, Apollos who taught the baptism of John was pulled aside and instructed. In Acts 19, those who had received John’s baptism (through the false teaching of Apollos) were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. In Galatians 2, Peter’s withdrawal from the Gentile brethren when Jewish brethren came to Antioch was withstood and rebuked. If Peter was teaching error in Acts 2:38 and Ananias was teaching error in Acts 22:16, as Melton suggests, why was their falsehood not corrected?
5. There is nothing in Acts 22:16 indicating Ananias associated water baptism with the Old Testament laws of purification. That is Mr. Melton’s attempt at explaining away the text.

Let’s come back to Acts 22:16 and notice what Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus.

And now why are you waiting? There is a sense of urgency which is consistently found when folks in the New Testament were taught about baptism. In Acts 2, three thousand people responded and were baptized that day (v 41). In Acts 8, as he taught Jesus to the Eunuch (v 35), Philip mentioned baptism; and the Eunuch, upon seeing water, sought to be baptized right away (v 36-39). In Acts 9, the primary account of Saul’s conversion, the soon to be apostle “...received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized” (v 18). In Acts 10, Cornelius and those who were gathered with him were commanded to be baptized (v 47-48; cf. 6). In Acts 16, Lydia’s heart was opened to heed the things spoken by Paul, which resulted in her and her household being baptized (v 14-15). Also in Acts 16, having heard about Jesus Christ, the Philippian jailer and his family were baptized immediately (v 33). This sense of urgency we see in the New Testament is a stark contrast to the put it off attitude that is prevalent in so many churches today. Why the difference? The people in the first century were being taught that baptism was essential for salvation, therefore they responded immediately. Today, people are being taught a different gospel (Galatians 1:6-8).

Arise and be baptized. He wasn't told to accept Jesus into his heart. He wasn't told to say a sinner's prayer. He was told to arise and be baptized. Will we listen to what the Bible says or to manmade doctrines?

And wash away your sins. What was the purpose of baptism? He was told being baptized would wash away his sins. Melton calls that baptism regeneration and rejects it, despite the fact that it is written in his Bible! Instead of outright rejecting what is recorded in Scripture, it might be better to look at the big picture; to see how the blood of Christ and baptism work together. We'll do so below.

Calling on the name of the Lord. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Calling on the name of the Lord is more than a vocal cry, prayer or appeal. Ananias reveals that it involves obedience to God's word. In particular, he applies it to the command to be baptized.

Mr. Melton brought up Revelation 1:5, which says Jesus "...washed us from our sins in His own blood..." Melton sought to set this text against Acts 22:16, and to discount the words of Ananias in the process. What a dishonest way to use the Bible! Notice, the apostle John didn't say how our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ, just that they are. If we seek to interpret Scripture with Scripture, we can easily come to an understanding of how this takes place. And to Mr. Melton's displeasure, Acts 22:16 is part of the solution.

Revelation 1:5 and Acts 22:16 are complimentary texts, just like Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38. We have noted that Jesus' blood was shed for (unto) the remission of sins, and we are also baptized for (unto) the remission of sins. Matthew 26 reveals what the Lord did for us, Acts 2 reveals how we gain access to it. In the same way, Revelation 1:5 reveals what has been done for us, and Acts 22:16 reveals how we gain access to it.

Hebrews 10:19-22 speaks about the blood of Christ, by which we have "boldness to enter the Holiest." But how has this happened? The writer says we had "...our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience..." In Hebrews 9, the author spoke of the sprinkling of blood upon the altar, the furnishings, the book and the people to establish the Old Covenant. We need the blood of Christ sprinkled upon us. But we cannot have His blood literally sprinkled upon us, it is a figure. So, how does it take place? The writer continues, "...and our bodies washed with pure water." What else could this be but a reference to baptism? Melton may like us to think the Hebrew author was referring to an Old Testament purification, but the context simply does not allow such. We are given entrance to the Holiest by the blood of Jesus when His blood is applied to our hearts, cleansing us of evil; and that takes place when we are baptized.

### **Water Baptism, 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27**

Mr. Melton mentions 1 Peter 3:21, and just as quickly as he refers to it, he discounts it and moves on. He says of baptism, "...it is a figure, not a doctrine." It is a doctrine. Doctrine simply means teaching, and the New Testament teaches about baptism a lot. And 1 Peter 3:21 doesn't merely say baptism is a figure, it says it is "the like figure." The Greek word here is *antitupos*, from which the English *antitype* has been transliterated. It means "after a true likeness" (Robertson's NT Word Pictures) or "corresponding (antitype), ie. a representative, counterpart" (Strong's). The concept of type and antitype is used frequently between the Old and New Testament. There are several Old Testament types of Christ (ie. Melchizedek, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, etc.). There are key elements about each of these (and others) which serve as foreshadows of the Messiah. Jesus is not just "a figure" of these Old Testament examples; He is the true fulfillment, He

is the antitype. The same word (antitupos) is used in Hebrews 9:24, where the Old Testament tabernacle and sacrifices are identified as types or “copies of the true.” The church and the sacrifice of Christ are the true. In the same fashion, Noah’s salvation through water (1 Peter 3:20) was the type, the foreshadow; whereas our salvation through water (verse 21) is the true.

Aside from his misapplication of “the like figure,” Melton has nothing else to say about 1 Peter 3:21. He cannot get around what it says, so he ignores the text. Notice what Peter wrote by the Spirit of God, “There is an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Peter specifically says baptism saves us; Melton simply ignores the statement. Baptism alone? Of course not. Noah wasn’t saved through water alone. Had he not believed God and obeyed, he would have perished like the rest. Likewise, we are not saved through water alone; we too must believe God and obey Him. But the fact remains, Peter identifies baptism as the point of salvation (just as he did in Acts 2:38).

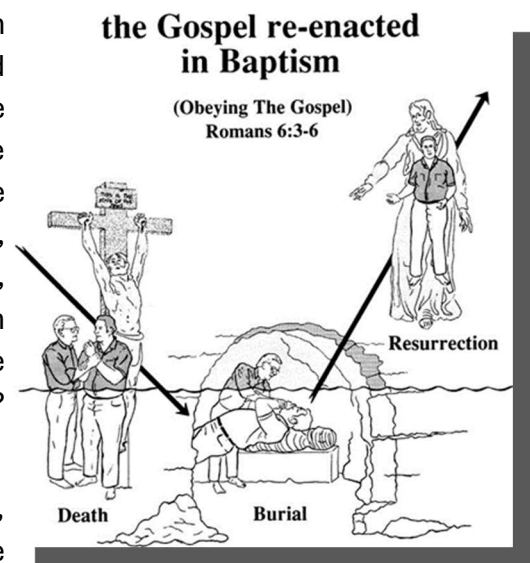
Moving on to Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27, Melton says, “...there is no WATER baptism in either...” Thus he concludes these texts are about “...the SPIRITUAL baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13...” It is true, the word “water” is not found in either text. If the absence of the word “water” means it is not water baptism; by the same token, would the absence of the word “spiritual” not likewise mean it is not spiritual baptism?

Paul clearly illustrates we have a death, burial and resurrection patterned after the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection. He died physically; we die to sin (Romans 6:1-3). He was buried in a tomb; we are buried in a watery grave (Romans 6:3-4). Coming forth from the grave, He conquered the power of death; arising from baptism, we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Notice Romans 6:5, “...if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection.” I’m curious, how does Melton’s spiritual baptism argument fit with verse 5? How does spiritual baptism unite us in the likeness of His death? Water baptism perfectly parallels the death, burial and resurrection.

Melton was right to group Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27 together, for what one speaks of, the other speaks of. Both use the phrase “...baptized into Christ...”, and as we have just noted, water baptism

fits the text. There is no reason to think Galatians 3:27 is not also about water baptism. In fact, the word baptism or some variation of it appears about 80 times in the New Testament. It means to immerse or submerge. It is true the word is used figuratively at times (ie. baptism of suffering, Matthew 20:22; Holy Spirit baptism, Mark 1:8; baptism into Moses and the sea, 1 Corinthians 10:2)., but by far, the most common use of the word is immersion in water. Basic Bible hermeneutics would have us understand a word by its common usage, unless something in the text demands otherwise. Nothing in Romans 6:3-4 or Galatians 3:27 demand that baptism be anything other than immersion in water.

Melton closes his assault on what the Bible says about baptism by citing Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “...Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel...” Why did Paul say that? The context reveals a spirit of sectarianism in the church at Corinth. Paul was thankful he only baptized a few of them, “...lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name...” (v 14-16). He is not saying baptism is not necessary, as Melton tries to infer from the text. But, the fact is, no one is sent to baptize. Baptism results





from the preaching of the gospel. Look through the conversion accounts in the book of Acts, and you will see consistently that those who heard and responded favourably to the gospel did so by being baptized.

Melton appeals to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, which reveals the gospel as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. He quickly points out "...the subject of water baptism isn't mentioned once." True. But, may I point out, the subject of repentance isn't mentioned once either. Will Melton affirm that we can be saved without repenting? (see Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19; 17:30-31) The absence of repentance or baptism in a particular text does not negate the fact that they are both mentioned several other places in connection with salvation.

The gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Both 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:17 speak of the necessity of obeying the gospel. How do you obey the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? Those are facts to be believed, but how does one obey such? Believing the gospel is not sufficient (James 2:19); Jesus says we must obey (Matthew 7:21-23; Acts 5:32). As we noted from Romans 6:3-4, in being baptized, one parallels the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. When Paul speaks of the Corinthians receiving the gospel, it is not merely that they believed it—they obeyed it. They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:14).

Melton has done his best to discredit the churches of Christ in his lengthy article, unfortunately by peddling a lot of misinformation and misrepresentation. I challenge readers to consider what is written in his material, and the responses given here; but especially to focus on what God's word says. It doesn't matter what any preacher says, whether Mr. Melton, myself, or another—it matters what the Lord says. Be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so (Acts 17:11). If I have failed to be honest in my use of God's word, please be a friend to me and point it out. The salvation of souls is too important to be playing around with. May we all be diligent students of the Bible, setting aside bias and simply accepting what the Lord would have us do.