Church of Christ dilemma

Answering the New Testament pattern controversy by sharing the doctrine of justification by faith alone

"Any time you have a (salvation) theology based upon God and man, you can never be absolutely sure of your salvation. Why? Because if my salvation depends upon both God and me- I might mess up."

John MacArthur- "Saved beyond a Doubt"

Introduction:

Churches of Christ often begin their study of the gospel by closely examining the conversions listed in the historical narrative of the book of Acts.

Acts 2:38 sound familiar?

Here the assumption is made that if a person will simply read the book of Acts and be careful to perform all of the same moral and religious commands that the first century believers did at salvation, that through our own obedience we can be saved as well.

These commands include hearing, believing, repenting from sin, confessing the name of Christ and being baptized in water, and then (once in a saved condition) that we can keep ourselves saved by being faithful and continuing to live a moral and religious good life.

In Church of Christ language, this is sometimes called 'following the gospel', 'meeting God's conditions of pardon', 'following the New Testament pattern', or the '5 step plan of salvation', and is a theology teaching 'salvation by New Testament law-keeping'.

Unfortunately beginning any study with a false presupposition, pretext, or false doctrinal bias can (and often does) prevent someone from ever understanding how we are saved by placing faith in Jesus Christ alone, and can lead a person into a salvation theology of works.

Here Church of Christ dilemma seeks to explain from the Scripture the often misunderstood doctrine of justification by faith alone to those in the Churches of Christ, and provide answers to many of the objections they have regarding this doctrine.

Galatians 2:15-16

"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."
Chapter One: What was the 5th century Pelagian Controversy? How was this controversy similar to what is taught in the Churches of Christ today?

During the early part of the 5th century there was a religious controversy which occurred that placed at odds a very earnest, moral, and zealous monk by the name of Pelagius, against the Bishop of Hippo we know today at St. Augustine. This controversy became known at the Pelagian Controversy and came to a crisis point at the council of Carthage in 418 AD.

Now to understand this controversy, we need to know something about the background of Pelagius.

Pelagius was born on the British Isles. And sometime later in life when he traveled to Rome, he became alarmed about the godlessness he saw in the clergy and other professing Christians. It was while in Rome that Pelagius had the reputation for the calling of Christians 'to the attaining of virtue and righteousness.'
In this way he and his followers had much in common with the Puritans in that they loved the law and the precepts of God, and were also very concerned about the moral laxity they saw in their own day.

The crisis point came, however, when Pelagius read a famous prayer written by St. Augustine, and in this prayer there was a statement that troubled him greatly. The statement was, "Oh God, *grant unto us what thou dost command*...".

It was this very statement in that prayer which set into motion the controversy that was to ensue.

The question on Pelagius’ mind was, why would anyone need to pray such a prayer? For what Augustine was asking God for was that He *grant* unto them the moral and religious power and ability to do the very things that He had commanded.

For Augustine believed that, unless God grants the necessary grace, man by himself is inherently unable to live in perfect obedience to God, and that in our fallen humanity we lack the moral power and religious ability to do the things that God commands.

This teaching deeply concerned Pelagius.

How can it be that a Just and Holy God could render a law or command that in our own humanity we do not have the moral power and ability to obey? For God to be just and at the same time issue a law or command that we cannot possibly obey...(and then punish us?)...would not only be unthinkable but monstrous.

It was here that Pelagius rejected the teaching that man requires any kind of grace, or divine assistance outside of himself in order to live in obedience to the commands and laws of God.

No, Pelagius argued, God saves us by providing us with His laws and commands, by giving us the excellent moral examples of Christ and the saints, and by the cleansing waters of baptism.

For according to Pelagius, salvation can and is received by our own cooperation and obedience to the necessary commands and laws of God as found within the pages of the New Testament.

**St. Augustine’s Response**

Augustine’s response, however, was that Pelagius’ doctrine was a spiritual impossibility. In light of Adam’s fall and what that meant to all of humanity, the idea that man can somehow decide to live and be saved by being obedient to all of the necessary commands and laws of God is simply an ability we do not have.

Adam had it, but when he sinned he lost it, not only for himself but also for all of his descendants as well.

It would be like an illustration of a long column of paper cups where, should a pin or needle be run completely through, not only would the integrity of the first cup be compromised, but also the character of all the succeeding cups would be ruined as well.

So it is with all of humanity, because of Adam’s sin, we have a flawed character or sinful nature.

And it is because of this sinful nature, we have a predisposition that makes us ever inclined to sin and thus makes it impossible for us to be saved through our own moral and religious "law-keeping".

This is why we are in such great need of a Savior.
An Argument for Augustine

In Romans Chapter 5:10-21, the Apostle Paul contrasts how that through Adam we were made sinners but through Jesus Christ we can be made righteous. In verse 19 he says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were (past tense) made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus Christ) the many will be (future tense) made righteous."

Paul continues this thought in the context Romans Chapter 7 and says, 'I agree that God’s law is good. But I see another law (the sinful nature) at work within the members of my body. For the very things I want to do, I do not do. And the things I do not want to do are the very things that I do. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of sin and death?'

Historically Christianity has said, 'We did not become sinners because we sinned; Rather, we sin because we are sinners.' In other words, we sin and fall short of God’s holiness and righteous standard because that is what sinners do.

And this is why in our fallen humanity we need of the grace and mercy of God.

Comparing Church of Christ theology

For anyone familiar with the Stone/ Campbell Churches of Christ, it is their view of the fall that makes them very similar to that of Pelagian theology.

This is due to the fact that they also believe that humanity is basically “good” or morally neutral, and that man has the moral power within himself to save himself through his own cooperation and obedience to all the necessary moral and religious requirements of God.

In other words, they deny (or minimize) the effects of the fall, and do not believe that Adam’s sin adversely affected man’s moral and religious abilities to follow commands and laws in order to be saved. Thus, it is the Church of Christ view of the fall (that the effects of the fall were negligible) that is the enabler of their theology of salvation by works.

By contrast, evangelical Christianity begins with the view that man is fallen, that his heart is inclined towards evil, and that he has an inherent inability through 'New Testament law-keeping' to be declared righteous in the sight of God, and in this way save his own soul.

This is why evangelical Christianity believes that man is in desperate need of a Savior and the perfect righteousness that God provides as a gift 'to all and upon all' who will place faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

So what is this 'gift of righteousness' that God provides to believers as a gift? What does it mean to "trust in Jesus Christ" for what we could not do and could not attain in our own sinful selves?

Other Bible references to the effects of the fall and how it adversely affected humanity:

Genesis 3; Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9
Romans 3:11-20; 5:10-21; 7:14-25; 8:3-4
Ephesians 2:1-10
Chapter Two: How does the Church of Christ gospel compare with that of evangelical Christianity?

Sacramentalism might be best described as 'the act (or the acts) that a person performs through which the grace of God is conferred to that person.'

Here under sacramentalism, the Churches of Christ have built an entire gospel theology based upon the assumption that if a person will study the conversions listed in the historical narrative of Acts (rather than the doctrinal books of the New Testament) and be careful to perform all the same moral and religious commands that the New Testament believers did at salvation, that "by doing these things" we can be saved as well.

These requirements (or sacraments) include hearing, believing, repenting from sin, confessing the name of Christ, and being baptized in water, and then once in a saved condition, that we keep ourselves saved by being faithful and continuing to live a moral and religious good life.

In Church of Christ language this is sometimes called 'following the gospel', 'meeting God's conditions of pardon', 'following the New Testament Pattern' and/or 'the 5 step plan of salvation' and is a gospel theology teaching salvation by New Testament Law-Keeping.

Now humanly speaking, it is certainly an understandable assumption.

However *biblically speaking*, there are a number of problems with this view.

First and foremost is that sacramentalism, or 'obedience to all of the necessary moral and religious requirements of the New Testament', is not how a person responds the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rather, *The Gospel or The Good News Message* is that Jesus came, died on the cross, paid the full penalty for our sin, that He was buried, and that on the Third Day God raised Him from the dead. 1 Cor. 15:1-4

How we are to respond to the gospel message is to believe.

That is, we are to believe God's promise, trusting in Jesus Christ and Him alone to save us. 1 Cor. 15:11

The second problem with the Church of Christ view of the gospel is that, as illustrated with the Pelagian Controversy, it does not take into account the dynamics of the fall of man.

The Bible tells us that because of Adam's sin, man is a sinner both by nature and by choice, and that even as believers we all sin and continue to stumble in many ways. Since God is holy, perfect, and just and will not allow sin into heaven, He cannot accept anything less than perfect obedience.

And because man is ever sinful and has a predisposition to sin and to do evil, never always able to do the right thing, the right way, for the right reason, we simply do not have the ability to save ourselves through our own moral or religious obedience, or in other words- New Testament law keeping.

As shown in Romans 3:9-20, the status of fallen man is that he has never been a law-keeper, but rather that HE IS A LAW-BREAKER.

Thus, sinful man is in desperate need of a Savior since he is unable to save himself.

So what is the solution?
In Romans 9:30-31 Paul makes an interesting contrast between those 'trying to be made righteous by what they do' (i.e. sacramentalism) with those 'who are trusting in Christ' who alone makes people righteous (salvation by grace through faith).

He writes,

"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal."

Why not?

"Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works of the law."

Continuing in the context, Paul tells us that the people of Israel missed the gospel because-

"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Romans 10:4

Summary

To those in the Church of Christ, the '5 step plan of salvation' is a moral and religious process we must do and accomplish in order to be saved. Evangelical Christianity believes that we are saved by trusting in the One who can save, that is, salvation though faith in Jesus Christ.

Members of the Church of Christ correctly understand that a belief the facts alone can not save. Unfortunately many fail to understand that there is a radical difference between believing the facts of John 3:16 and believing the promise of John 3:16.

Thus, they have drawn the conclusion that the righteousness we need must then come to us through our own imperfect obedience to the 'necessary' moral and religious requirements of the New Testament, rather than coming to understand that God has provided the very righteousness we need literally through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now for those in the Church of Christ who believe we are saved by our obedience to all of the necessary moral and religious commands of the New Testament, that in heaven- I’ll be the first to come up and shake your hand. By reaching heaven through "New Testament Law-Keeping", you will have certainly accomplished an incredible and monumental task!

But there are those who are trying to share the good news about the gift of perfect righteousness that God provides as a gift to all, and upon all, who place faith in Jesus Christ, which is far superior to anything we can ever hope to attain through our own imperfect obedience.

It is the very righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself, given to all those who will place faith and trust in Him, because JESUS has become for us OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, HOLINESS, AND REDEMPTION. 1 Cor. 1:30

References to consider:

Galatians 2:16-17, 3:1-23
Ephesians 2:8-10
Philippians 3:1-9

Chapter Three: What is the doctrine of Justification by faith alone? How is it misunderstood by the Churches of Christ?
Ask a member of the Church of Christ what the doctrine of justification by faith alone is, and they will most likely tell you 'It is a doctrine teaching that a person can be saved simply by believing the basic facts or truths of the Christian faith.' These facts may include believing in God, believing that the Bible is the Word of God, and believing the facts that Jesus died on the cross and rose again.

But here the Church of Christ member will often justify their rejection of this doctrine by saying, 'But even the demons believe and of course this doesn't do them any good whatsoever.'

Here it's important to know that those who believe we are saved by personal faith in Christ do not believe salvation is merely by believing facts of the Christian faith, or by simply believing in some general way that Jesus lived, died on the cross and that He rose again.

Rather, we are believing God's promise that Jesus Christ saves us.

That is, as Abraham "believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness", we are also believing God's promise that on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself and received in His body ALL of God's wrath, anger, and righteous indignation for OUR sin, and that God punished Jesus (our substitute) so that He would NOT have to punish us, and raised Him from the dead.

Please note, if God has spent all of His anger and wrath for OUR SIN out on Jesus Christ, He is no longer angry at us. As Jesus said in John 5:24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." John 5:24

However, there is another important point that Church of Christ types often fail to understand- that Jesus Christ lived holy for us as well. That Jesus lived holy FOR US so that the basis of us going to heaven is based on His perfect life, and not our own.

The Word of God tells us that 'God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law,' (Galatians 4:3) and that Jesus became FOR us "our righteousness, holiness and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30

**Question: So where is Justification by faith taught in the New Testament?**

There are 154 places in the New Testament that tell us salvation is by believing, that it is by trusting, that it is by placing our faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 1:16 Paul writes "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." He continues on to say, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed - a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "the righteous will live by faith."

People often assume that the righteousness Paul is speaking about here is God's own personal righteousness. And they aware that they are not righteous and that God is righteous, and they cannot understand how there can be much good news in a gospel that reveals God's own righteousness and holiness to a people who are not righteous.

But when Paul speaks about 'the righteousness of God that is revealed' in this passage, he is not speaking about the same righteousness by which God Himself is righteous. But rather he is speaking about a righteousness that God bestows and gives freely to all and upon all who will believe.

This righteousness is not a righteousness that arises out of ourselves by our own moral or religious conduct or obedience to all the commands given to us in the New Testament. Rather it is the gift of righteousness that God gives to all and upon all who will believe and place faith in Jesus Christ.
"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." Romans 3:21-22.

The bottom line is that people are to believe upon Jesus Christ, to trust in Him as their Savior. As Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

It is that simple.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." John 1:12

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

"Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears my Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life." John 5:24

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." Rom. 1:16

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves." Eph. 2:8

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." Gal. 2:15, 16

These are just a few of the verses, 154 places in the New Testament in all, where the Bible says those who place faith in Jesus Christ HAVE eternal life.

Other References to Consider:


Galatians 2:11-21, 3:1-29, 5:1-6

Ephesians 1:1-21, 2:1-10

Philippians 3:1-11

Chapter Four: What about James chapter 2 and “faith without works is dead”?

Many times Church of Christ members will not even consider the doctrine of justification by faith simply because they are convinced it is in direct conflict with James chapter 2.

Here the passage is interpreted to mean that both faith and works are required for salvation, rather than understanding the good works shown and demonstrated in the life of the believer are simply the practical result of a true and genuine faith.
In other words, the point made by James but missed by the Churches of Christ is that if there are no good works shown or demonstrated in your life, you had better go back and check your faith. For true faith (as opposed to false or dead faith) will show and demonstrate itself by good works.

Here it cannot be emphasized enough that when interpreting James 2 that the Churches of Christ read a number of assumptions into the passage.

These assumptions include:

a) Justification by faith alone is a false doctrine.

b) It was an error thought even in the first century.

c) That James was speaking out against it even then.

What the Churches of Christ fail to consider is that salvation by faith alone was taught in the early church.

But unfortunately there were some who were confusing salvation by faith alone with salvation by mere intellectual assent alone, and some were deceiving themselves thinking they were saved simply because of a superficial profession of faith and a casual acceptance of the Truths of the Christian faith.

In light of this we can certainly understand why James would see a need to challenge those who believed they were saved by mere intellectual assent.

Starting in vrs 14 he writes:

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

So what is shown itself to be dead?

Your faith, not accompanied by action, is revealing and showing itself to be dead since good works are not being shown or demonstrated in your life.

Understanding the word "Justify"

But undoubtedly the most frequent objection raised by the Churches of Christ regarding the doctrine of justification by faith alone is James' use of the word justify- "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?"

Since the view of justify is understood by the Churches of Christ as "to make righteous," how then can anyone possibly suggest that we are made righteous by faith in Jesus Christ alone when James clearly says that Abraham was 'made righteous' by what he did?

Here the Churches of Christ should reconsider their understanding of the word justify.

For rather than to mean to make righteous, justify is a legal term which means "to show or to declare as righteous".
For example, when an officer of the law uses deadly force in the line of duty, an investigation is made to determine whether or not the use of deadly force was justified.

If it is determined that the actions were justified, this certainly does not mean the officer was 'made righteous' by using deadly force. Rather it means that after viewing the evidence, the tribunal (those who were tasked to investigate the incident) determined and declared that the officer's actions were right and appropriate.

Now such a definition may seem to be of little consequence. But consider the ramifications.

In Luke 7:29 the Word tells us that "the tax collectors justified God."

Clearly this cannot mean that the tax collectors made God righteous, because God already was. However the tax collectors did 'show, deem, or declare' God as righteous by being baptized by John.

In this way James 2:21 should be understood as "Was not Abraham our father 'shown or declared as righteous' by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"

After all, Abraham did not actually sacrifice his son upon the altar.

How then could he have been "made righteous" by works that he never did?

**Summary**

What separates the Churches of Christ from evangelical Christianity is not the presence of works in the life of the believer, but the proper role of works in the life of the believer.

Are works a necessary precondition for salvation, or are they merely a fruit, result, or byproduct of the believer's own regeneration and salvation?

R.C. Sproul in his book *Faith Alone* uses two formulas shown here to distinguish between the evangelical and Roman Catholic understanding of works, which is very similar to that of the Churches of Christ.

Here the terms faith, works, and justification are present in both formulas. However, the order of these terms shows the radical difference between these two opposing views:

**Roman Catholic view:** Faith + Works — (results in) —> Justification

**The Evangelical view:** Faith — (results in) —> Justification + Works

In the Roman Catholic formula, works are a necessary precondition for justification. In the evangelical view, good works are merely the fruit or result of justification.

Ephesians 2:8-10 says "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

In light of the Scripture, we maintain that salvation is a gift of God, brought to us by Christ, and received by faith. Good works are merely the practical result of a born again life and the result of a true and genuine faith.
Chapter Five: What about Baptism? Doesn’t a person have to be “water” baptized in order to be saved?

One objection that will certainly need to be addressed when discussing the doctrine of justification by faith with those in the Churches of Christ is the subject of water baptism. 

For if the Word of God does teach that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone and our obedience to the commands of God are only the result of our salvation and divine grace (which they contest), how is it then that baptism saves us?

And to be sure, evangelical Christianity does believe we are identified and baptized into Christ when we are saved. However, let us be clear that what we are talking about is true, actual, or Holy Spirit Baptism, rather than rite, ritual or “water” baptism, which is the believer’s outward sign or symbol of that event.

This will be discussed in greater detail in a moment. However, may I first say that much can be written comparing the different views of water baptism held by the Churches of Christ and those beliefs held by evangelical Christianity.

Here those in the Churches of Christ are convinced that the only way an individual can ever receive the forgiveness of sins is through obedience to the command of water baptism. And the salvation of the believer who has done everything as written in the New Testament except have their sins “washed away” through water baptism is uncertain at best.

However, water baptism is viewed by evangelical Christianity in the same light as Communion and the Lord’s Supper in that it is an ordinance practiced by those who are already saved.

Therefore to say that we have been saved through baptism, is referring to regeneration or the baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs when the individual places their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

As Titus 3:5 says, we were saved “not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”

Perhaps then the best way to explain baptism is that “water” baptism is the outward sign or symbol of the believer’s true or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Those in the Church of Christ think of baptism as being first and only with water, as though the definition of baptism (to dip, plunge, or immerse) implies being dipped, plunged or immersed in the medium of water.


Now viewing baptism in its proper context we can now begin to understand the passages often misused by the Stone/ Campbell Churches of Christ to defend their gospel of “water” baptism for salvation.

For when we consider passages like 1 Peter 3:21, a verse often cited by the Churches of Christ- “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you”, we begin to understand that the baptism the writer had in mind is the real or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit:
"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype (the superior, true, or actual) 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..."

Scripture often refers to the Holy Spirit as "the living water" that God provides, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. For example in John 4 Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water (h2o) will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them (the Holy Spirit) will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Also in John 7 Jesus said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.

Thus, it seems apparent "this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you” is talking about the anti-type "water” baptism- that is, the superior, real, or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit baptism that now saves you.

May I also point out that if the writer were simply referring to h2o baptism here, then the wrong people in this passage were "water” baptized. For just as the example of Pharaoh and his army in 1 Cor. 10:1-4, the only ones who had h2o baptism applied to them were those who perished in the flood!

So while it is true that water baptism points us to the spiritual reality of the believer’s Holy Spirit baptism, we dare not be trusting in it (the symbol) to save us. For just as there are those within the body of the church who administer the rite of water baptism to new believers (Matt. 28:18-19), it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that actually places us into the body of Christ:

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:13

Other Related Scriptures

Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:24-27, Joel 2:28-29

Gal. 3:26-27, Eph. 1:13-14, Col. 2:11-14, Titus 3:45

Chapter 6: Why are worship methodology issues such as the non use of instrumental music often so important to those in the Church of Christ?

Although both the Church of Christ and evangelical Christianity often use the same Christian words and phrases, it usually does not take long before each begins to notice some significant differences or emphasis in areas that one would think are well understood and accepted practices throughout Christianity today.

A perfect example, I believe, would be over the observance of Christmas or Easter, the use of instrumental music, or the observance of Communion and the Lord’s Supper.

For those within evangelical Christianity, one cannot help to be curious over why the Church of Christ is often so dogmatic, and tend to make such methodology and procedural issues so emphatically important.
And conversely, there are those within the Church of Christ who are just as perplexed over why some methodology and worship practices seem to be of little concern among other Christian movements and fellowships today.

To be rather candid, issues of worship sometimes become all important to those in the Church of Christ simply because of their view of justification.

If righteousness is provided to the believer only through their own obedience to the moral and religious requirements of the New Testament (i.e. sacramentalism), then it becomes imperative that the correct methodology and procedure be used in worship in order to be saved.

Therefore, by understanding that the Churches of Christ often take an Old Testament approach to salvation and apply it directly to the New Testament, we can certainly begin to understand their concern.

As Deuteronomy 6:25 says, “And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”

The GOOD NEWS message of the gospel, however, is that the very righteousness that God requires, He also provides. And rather than depending on our own ability to meet all the necessary moral and religious requirements of God, Jesus Christ lived holy for us so that the basis of going to heaven would be based on His perfect life and not our own.

As Romans 10:4 says “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

This is why evangelical Christianity believes that good works by Christian believers are merely the result of their faith and the working of divine grace in them, not their own personal contribution to their own salvation.

Jesus Christ is the only Savior; One does not save oneself.

For those determined to try and save themselves through what they do through their own cooperation and obedience to all the necessary moral and religious requirements of God, consider for a moment the righteousness that God provides on the basis of faith that the Apostle Paul talks about in Phil. 3:1-9:

“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh— (i.e. those in the church who want to mix works with grace) For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If others think they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that (righteousness) which is through faith in Christ— The righteousness which is from God and is by faith.”

Chapter Seven: Is the Church of Christ view of the gospel outside that of evangelical Christianity?
The Encyclopedia Americana (Year 2000 Edition) defines evangelicalism as "a distinctly Protestant movement that stresses the Reformation doctrine of salvation solely by faith in Jesus Christ. (See also Evangelical Alliance.)"

Here we may even wish to think of it as a unifying term used by the Protestants during the Reformation.

For although the Protestants could be divided over various theological positions, such as church doctrine, church government, methodology and procedural matters in worship, they could nevertheless agree on two essential Christian doctrines.

These two central doctrines embraced by all of evangelical Christianity were the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in all doctrinal matters of the church, and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Here under the term "evangelicalism" we can see the difference between Protestants and Catholics even today.

In the matter of Holy Scripture, although the Roman Catholic Church considers the New Testament authoritative, it also places equal authority in the Pope and the decisions of various church councils.

And in the matter of justification, although the Roman Catholic Church believes that belief and faith is essential to justification, they do not believe that justification of the believer is by faith alone.

Now lest I be misunderstood in this comparison of evangelical Christianity and the Stone/ Campbell Churches of Christ, I am not for a moment suggesting that the Church of Christ churches use any additional sources of authority beyond that of Holy Scripture.

However, it is well understood that the Church of Christ disagrees with evangelical Christianity's understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Thus, it is the doctrine of justification by faith alone that sets evangelical Christianity apart from the Stone/ Campbell Churches of Christ.

* * *

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” John 5:39-40.

Chapter Eight: Is the Church of Christ a good biblical church? Do all the Churches of Christ have the same 'faith plus works' salvation theology?

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Answer: This is a difficult question to answer due to the phrase "Church of Christ" being of such a broad description. There are many churches who refer to themselves as the "Church of Christ." Even within the most widespread "Church of Christ" denomination, there can be significant differences between the churches.
There is no doubt that many in the Church of Christ denomination are genuine believers in Christ who desire to truly worship, follow, and obey Him. At the same time, there are other Church of Christ churches that are borderline cult-like in their preferences, practices, and doctrines.

While we will not with one broad brush condemn all the Churches of Christ or every church that refers to itself as the “Church of Christ”, we will nevertheless express some of our concerns about what the Church of Christ traditionally believes and teaches.

One “minor” Church of Christ issue is not allowing musical instruments in worship services.

While we entirely agree that a church is well within the freedom God gives to not use musical instruments in worship, the problem is that some within the Church of Christ are fanatically against musical instruments and many are fanatical to the point of declaring any church that uses musical instruments as not being a true church.

This is only becomes a 'salvational issue' when the theology being taught is that we are saved by sacramentalism and by what we do rather than by trusting in the One who can save.

Such dogmatism over a non-essential issue is often the mark of a cult, not the mark of a good biblical church.

A second issue is the fact that some in the Church of Christ claim to be “the one true church,” outside of which there is no salvation. By no means do all Church of Christ members believe this, but it is prevalent enough to warrant concern.

Some go so far as to argue that since the name is “Church of Christ,” that indicates their church/denomination is the one and only true Church of the Lord Jesus. This is completely unbiblical. There is no one church or denomination that encompasses the entire Body of Christ.

The “one true church of Christ” is comprised of all who have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, depending upon Him alone for salvation. Thus the Church is composed of true believers everywhere, no matter what their local church or denominational affiliation is. The claim of exclusive access to salvation is another common identification of a cult, not the teaching of a good biblical church.

A third and very important issue is the Church of Christ’s emphasis on water baptism as being necessary for salvation. Church of Christ advocates point to Scriptures such as Acts 2:38, John 3:5, Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:21, and Acts 22:16 as biblical evidence that baptism is required for salvation.

There is no denying that baptism is very important. Baptism is intended to be an initial act of obedience to Christ, an illustration of Christ’s death and resurrection, a public declaration of faith in Christ, a step of identification with Him, and a proclamation of desire to follow Him.

And in the minds of the early Christians, water baptism was so inextricably linked with salvation that the two have been viewed by some as inseparable. Thus the idea that a person could receive Christ as Savior and not be water baptized was completely foreign to the early church.

With that said, however, water baptism is not required for salvation. There are biblically plausible and contextually valid interpretations of each of the above Scriptures that do not indicate water baptism as being necessary for salvation. There are many Scriptures that declare salvation to be a gift of God, bought to us by Jesus Christ, and received by faith, with no mention of baptism or any other work requirement of the believer (John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8-9).

If water baptism is necessary for salvation, these Scriptures are in error and the Bible is contradictory. And in no place in Scripture does it ever tell us that those who are not baptized in water will not be saved.

Finally, Church of Christ advocates also argue that when the Bible speaks of salvation "by faith,” it is speaking of a living faith or belief that produces 'the necessary works of obedience', such as repentance, confession and being water baptized.

Here they are very careful to claim that while water baptism is not a work that earns salvation, it is a
necessary "a work of God" that is required before salvation can be granted.

For the Church of Christ members, the requirements of water baptism and confession are no less important than faith (i.e. belief) and repentance. The problem with this is that, while it may seem to be a subtle difference from the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, it is in fact a most crucial difference.

A person who has genuinely received salvation will produce good fruit simply because of being born-again. Good works are the inevitable result of the believer's own regeneration and salvation (Ephesians 2:10). What differentiates a “living faith” from a “dead faith” in James 2:14-26 is the presence of good works in the life of the believer, not the requirement of works.

Thus, Church of Christ advocates would be right to denounce a church that teaches that 'intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel' as sufficient for salvation- as some in the Church of Christ assert that this is what the doctrine of justification by faith alone teaches.

However, don't be fooled or misled in the distinction that is being made.

While it is faith in Jesus Christ as YOUR ONLY SAVIOR that saves a person, genuine faith in Jesus Christ will nevertheless because of regeneration produce the fruit or the result of good works in that of the life of the believer.

Thus to say that 'good works are a necessary precondition for salvation' is to make salvation a work of the believer, not on the already finished work of Jesus Christ.

As Titus 3:5 declares, "He (Jesus) saved us – not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

So, are Church of Christ churches good biblical churches?

This is a question that cannot be answered with an all-encompassing response.

You may be attending a Church of Christ that does declare that salvation is God's free gift to us, brought to us by Christ, and received by faith. However, if there is an extreme over-emphasis on the absence of musical instruments, a claim of exclusive access to salvation, or a doctrine of salvation that is works-based, these are marks of a church that definitely should not be attended or participated in.

This requires discernment on the part of a believer considering joining a Church of Christ church, for the answer to this question depends entirely on which type of Church of Christ it is.

Added note from the ministry of Church of Christ dilemma

To better understand Church of Christ theology, it should be noted that the Church of Christ view of the fall is very similar to that of Pelagian theology in that they believe or assume that humanity is basically "good" or morally neutral, and that man has the moral power and ability to save himself through his own obedience to all of the necessary moral and religious requirements of the New Testament.

This is to say that Churches of Christ deny (or minimize) the effects of the fall, and do not believe that Adam's sin adversely affected man's moral ability to follow commands and laws in order to be saved. Thus, it is the Church of Christ view of the fall (that the effects of the fall were negligible) that is the enabler of a salvation theology of works.

By contrast, evangelical Christianity begins with the understanding that man's heart is inclined towards evil, and that he has an inherent inability through New Testament law-keeping to be declared righteous in the sight of God and in this way save his own soul.

That is why evangelical Christianity believes that man is in desperate need of a Savior and the perfect righteousness that God provides as a gift 'to all and upon all' who will place faith in Jesus Christ.
Chapter Nine: What are some examples that will help illustrate the doctrinal differences between the Churches of Christ and evangelical Christianity?

I believe one of the best ways we can draw a contrast between the Church of Christ and evangelical Christianity is to compare lyrics of each one’s beloved songs and hymns.

For although both views enjoy most of the same great Christian songs and hymns, the Church of Christ may be surprised to learn that some of their songs would actually be considered heretical in evangelical Christianity.

Now I realize that’s quite an accusation to make.

And may I say that I do not make it in a careless, reckless, or cavalier manner.

However to demonstrate what I mean, let’s take a moment to look at a few of the songs that are easily recognized in the Church of Christ, and then consider why they would not be accepted in evangelical Christianity.

A Beautiful Life

Each day I’ll do a golden deed,
By helping those who are in need;  
My life on earth is but a span,
And so I’ll do the best I can.

Chorus: Life’s evening sun is sinking low,
A few more days and I must go.  
To meet the deeds that I have done.  
Where there will be no setting sun.

To be a child of God each day,
My light must shine a-long the way;  
I’ll sing His praise while ages roll
And strive to help some troubled soul.

The only life that will endure,
Is the one that’s kind and good and pure;
And so for God I’ll take my stand,
Each day I’ll lend a helping hand.

(Traditional/Public Domain)

At first glance we may not see anything wrong with this song, for certainly both the Church of Christ and evangelical Christianity believes that God has called us to live holy lives that honor Him, and that each of us will be called to give an account of our lives.

However, there is a radical difference.

While continuing to live a good life is a necessary condition for salvation in the Church of Christ, evangelical Christianity believes that a good life is merely the fruit or result of a person’s salvation.
In other words, when we place faith in Jesus Christ, He saves us and our works have nothing to do with it. Thus for the believer, since their sin has already been judged at the cross, the judgment they will experience has nothing to do with salvation but rather is about rewords. (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15)

But here in this song we can see Pelagian or works theology being taught in that, if we can just live a “good enough” life, we can have a home forever in heaven. Yet no where does it ever mention that salvation is by the grace and mercy of God, brought to us by Jesus Christ and received by faith.

I’ll Be List’ning

When the Savior calls I will answer,
When He calls for me I will hear,
When the Savior calls I will answer,
I’ll be somewhere list’ning for my name.

Chorus: I’ll be somewhere list’ning
I’ll be somewhere list’ning,
I’ll be somewhere list’ning for my name.
(Repeat)

If my heart is right when He calls me,
If my heart is right I will hear,
If my heart is right when He calls me,
I’ll be somewhere list’ning for my name.

If my robe is white when He calls me,
If my robe is white I will hear,
If my robe is white when He calls me,
I’ll be somewhere list’ning for my name.

(Traditional/ Public Domain)

May I say if you understand this to mean that salvation is dependent upon you and your good heart and your good works....Well, Good Luck with all that.

The Bible tells us that except by the blood of Jesus Christ, our hearts and robes are anything but white.

Scripture reveals that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and DESPERATELY WICKED; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) "there is NOT a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" (Ecc. 7:20), that "there is NO ONE righteous...NO ONE who does good...ALL have turned away" (Rom. 3:10-12), that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), that "ALL OUR righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), and that "if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1:8)

Which again is why we are in such GREAT NEED of a Savior!

Hard Fightin’ Soldier

I am a hard fightin’ soldier on the battle field (Repeat 3 times)
Chorus: I keep on bringin’ souls to Jesus, by the service that I give.

You’ve got to walk right and talk right and sing right and pray right on the battlefield. (Repeat 3 times)
**Chorus:** I keep on bringing souls to Jesus by the service that I give.

I got a helmet on my head and in my hand a sword and Shield (Repeat)
**Chorus:** I keep on bringin’ souls to Jesus, by the service that I give.

(Traditional/ Public Domain)

Earlier we mentioned that the reason we must "walk right and talk right and sing right and pray right" according to the Churches of Christ is because of their performance view of justification.

If righteousness is available to us only through our own co-operation and obedience to the necessary moral and religious requirement of God, then we must be fully obedient in every way in order to attain to it. In fact as James 2:10 says, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

However, the good news message of the gospel is that God has provided the very righteousness we need and is available to all and upon all who will place faith in Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law," and that Jesus became FOR US "our righteousness, holiness and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30.

**One final note**

As we draw this section to a close, I would like to say again that most of the classic songs and hymns embraced by evangelical Christianity are going to be found in Church of Christ hymnals.

Of course, someone may be inclined to ask that if the Churches of Christ actually teach "Pelagian" or "works-for-salvation" theology, why then would songs that teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone be accepted in their own hymnals?

And that’s a good question.

And as one who has grown up in the Church of Christ, the only answer that I can give is that the lessons these songs taught us were hidden from our eyes.

After all, when you stop to think about it, the term **justification by faith alone** never appears in any of the these well-known Christian songs and hymns:

**Just As I Am**  
**My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less**  
**Nothing But The Blood**  
**'Tis So Sweet To Trust In Jesus**

And yet, when we stop to consider the context and message of the lyrics, clearly the implications of this doctrine are being taught.

**Chapter Ten: Is there any practical information that might be helpful to know when sharing the gospel with those in the Churches of Christ?**

For those trying to share the gospel with those in the Church of Christ, there are two important doctrinal issues that you should be aware of that may help in avoiding some unnecessary confusion.
First, it's important to know that those in the Church of Christ have made an understandable assumption that to be saved, what a person has to do is read the Bible, believe it, and then cooperate with all the ‘right or necessary moral and religious requirements' as they are found within the pages of the New Testament.

Here, humanly speaking, the Churches of Christ make an understandable assumption.

However biblically speaking, keep in mind this isn't the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-11) and second, that it doesn't take into account the dynamics of the fall of man (Romans 5:12-21).

The Bible tells us that because of Adam's sin, man is a sinner both by nature and by choice and that even as believers we all sin and stumble in many ways. Therefore we can never go to heaven based upon our imperfect good works and is why we are in such Great need of Savior.

The Gospel or GOOD NEWS Message is that God has provided forgiveness and the perfect righteousness we need and is available to all who will place faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Please note, the point of contention is between 'works righteousness" (that righteousness that is attained by doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reason) and 'faith righteousness' (that righteousness which is a gift from God, brought to us by Christ, and received by faith).

Our point is that the righteousness that is by faith in the person of Christ supersedes that righteousness that is by 'doing the right thing, the right way, for the right reason', because the righteousness of Christ Himself is directly given, credited, or imputed unto the believer. As Romans 10:4 says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

The second item one should know is that when sharing the gospel with those in the Church of Christ and telling them of the righteousness that is given to us by faith, it's important to know that the Church of Christ concept of the doctrine justification by faith alone is flawed.

This is important.

You see, your belief that we are saved by placing faith in Jesus Christ is understood by them as teaching nothing more than salvation by merely believing the facts of the Christian faith. So when you tell them we are saved by simply placing faith in the Savior, what they hear is 'salvation by mere intellectual assent'.

And being well aware that even the demons "believe" and that just believing the facts does not save, those in the Church of Christ 'throw the baby out with the bath water' and thus rejects the entire doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Therefore they embrace a mixed-up gospel theology of works and "water" baptism for salvation by default and seldom, if ever, come to a biblical understanding of how a person is saved by placing faith and trust in the Savior.

Our message to share is that justification by faith does not mean 'salvation by merely believing the facts of the Christian faith', but rather it is believing God's promise that on the cross Jesus Christ took upon Himself ALL of God's wrath and anger for OUR sin, and that God punished Jesus so that He wouldn't have to punish us, and that God raised Him from the dead. 1 Cor. 1-11

Please note, it's certainly possible to believe that someone is the president of the United States; However, just because you believe this to be factually true, doesn't necessarily mean or imply that you have faith in them as president.

Again, there is a radical difference between mere intellectual assent and faith, or in other words, a difference between believing the facts of John 3:16 and believing God's promise of John 3:16.
Our Message to share

Now convincing them that there is a radical difference between salvation by mere intellectual assent and faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ is only half our problem.

We still must be able to show where the doctrine of justification by faith is found in the Scriptures.

Personally, as one who has grown up in the Church of Christ, my first reaction after being introduced to this doctrine taught was, "That's interesting. I wonder where they (i.e. Baptists and other evangelicals) found this doctrine in Scripture?"

Though it may be hard to believe, I had simply never heard this doctrine before and I was curious to know how people could possibly come to such a conclusion based upon the Word of God.

It wasn't until later that I found out that there are 154 passages in the New Testament that tell us salvation is by placing our faith and in Jesus Christ, that it is systematically taught in the book of Romans in chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 & 11, and because of a doctrinal controversy is also addressed in Galatians, chapters 2, 3, 4 & 5.

In other words, be sure to do your homework to be able show where this doctrine is systematically taught from the Word of God, and not some abstract or obscure doctrine taken out of context from a few passages of scriptures.

What is important?

May I say there will be a tremendous temptation to argue with the Church of Christ over some point of their doctrine, such as their belief system of "water" baptism for salvation.

Here we can agree that we are identified/baptized into Christ when we are saved. However, let us be clear that what we are talking about is true, actual, or Holy Spirit baptism, rather than rite, ritual or "water" baptism, which is the believer's outward sign or symbol of that event.

Galatians 3:2 says, "I would like to learn one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

Our point is that it is only by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ given to us by faith that we can ever hope to stand in the presence a infinitely Holy God, without blemish and free from accusation.

It is when we hear the gospel and believe it, placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, that God responds by giving us new birth through the baptism of the Holy Spirit that comes upon us at conversion-

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession-to the praise of His glory." Eph. 1:13-14

Thus "water" baptism, which unfortunately is the very axle upon which the Church of Christ member is riding (or hoping upon) for eternal life (i.e. getting their flesh immersed in h2o) is simply the believer's sign or a symbol of the true or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit that happens at conversion.

Again, good works now evident in the life of the believer are not our own personal contribution to our own salvation, but is merely the result of our new life and new spiritual birth that occurs the moment a person places faith in Jesus as Savior.
Questions for Discussion and Witnessing

Finally, I would recommend starting any salvation conversation your Church of Christ friend by simply asking them two questions:

First, although they are convinced “faith alone” is a false doctrine, ask them what they believe the doctrine of justification by faith alone actually teaches. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU ARE ASKING THEM TO EXPLAIN OR VERBALIZE WHAT THEY THINK YOU BELIEVE ABOUT 'FAITH ALONE'.

Rest assured they will give the false Church of Christ narrative or presupposition that faith alone teaches that a person can be saved 'simply by believing as true the facts of the Christian faith.'

Second, ask them- although they disagree with the doctrine (or their false perception of the doctrine), where people are convinced the doctrine of justification by faith alone is explained and taught from the Word of God.

And here I will say they will have no idea.

So asking these two questions can be helpful in accomplishing two things:

First, it may give you the opportunity to clarify both what the doctrine of justification by faith alone actually teaches (and what it doesn’t teach), and second, it may also give you the opportunity TO SHOW WHERE the doctrine is systematically found, taught, and explained from the Word of God.

Thus given this information, to accept or reject the gospel is now up to them. May God open their hearts to believe upon Jesus Christ and Him alone for eternal life.

Apologetics Section/ FAQ- Part 2

Answers for Church of Christ baptism-for-salvation pretext verses:

Chapter 1: Mark 16:16

Chapter 2: John 3:5-8

Chapter 3: Acts 2:38

Chapter 4: Acts 22:16

Chapter 5: Galatians 3:27

Chapter 6: Ephesians 4:5

Chapter 7: 1 Peter 3:21

Chapter 1: Does Mark 16:16 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?
As we consider Mark 16:16 ("He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"), it is important to remember that there are some textual issues with Mark chapter 16 and whether or not these verses were originally part of the Gospel of Mark, or added later by a scribe.

Assuming that verse 16 was included in Mark’s original manuscript, does it teach that water baptism is required for salvation?

When one carefully examines this verse, it becomes clear that in order to make this passage teach that water baptism is required for salvation, one must go beyond what the verse actually says.

Certainly there is no controversy that this verse teaches that belief is necessary for salvation, which is consistent with all other verses in the Bible that deal with salvation (e.g. John 3:18; John 5:24; John 12:44; John 20:31; 1 John 5:13).

And if we look at this passage closely, we can see that it is composed of two basic statements:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

He who does not believe will be condemned.

So here we find both the positive condition of belief (that whoever believes will be saved) and the negative condition of unbelief (that whoever does not believe will be condemned).

But notice that nowhere in this passage, nor anywhere else in the Bible, will we find the negative condition of baptism that 'whoever is not baptized will be condemned.'

Again, there is no example anywhere in Scripture that whoever is not water baptized will be condemned.

**So how can we know whether or not a believer will be condemned if they have not been water baptized?**

As with any verse or scripture, we must always interpret the passage in question in the light of the rest of Scripture. And any interpretation that that goes against the clear teaching of Scripture is a faulty interpretation.

In other words, Scripture must line up with the Scripture.

In the case of baptism and salvation, the Bible is very clear that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not by works of any kind. (Eph. 2:8-9)

To summarize the evidence against water baptism being required for salvation:

1—The Bible is clear that we are saved by faith alone. Abraham was saved by faith, and we are saved by faith (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-22; Eph. 2:8-10).
2—People have been saved without being water baptized. The thief on the cross was saved but not baptized and Cornelius was saved before he was water baptized (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-16; 15:8-9).

3—Water baptism is a testimony of our faith and a public declaration that we believe in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures clearly tell us that we have eternal life the moment we believe (John 5:24), and belief must always come before being baptized. Water baptism does not save us any more than walking an aisle or saying a prayer saves us. We are saved the moment we place faith in Jesus Christ.

4—The Bible never says that if one is not baptized that he is not saved.

5—If baptism is required for salvation, it also means that no one can be saved without someone else being present. In other words, if baptism is required for salvation, someone must baptize a person before he can be saved. This effectively limits who can be saved and when he can be saved.

It means that someone who believes in and trusts in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but does not have the chance of being baptized in water, cannot be saved. The consequences of this doctrine are devastating. A soldier who believes but is killed in battle before he can be water baptized would perish, etc.

6—Throughout the Bible we see that at the point of faith a believer possesses all the promises and blessings of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 6:47; 20:31; Acts 10:43; 13:39; 16:31). When one believes, he has eternal life, does not come under judgment, and has passed from death into life (John 5:24), all before they are baptized in water.

If someone does believe in baptismal regeneration, they would have to carefully consider who or what they are really putting their faith and trust in. For example, is that person placing their faith in act of being water baptized, or on the finished work of Jesus Christ? In Whom or in what is the believer trusting in for salvation?

We must never forget that our faith must rest in Jesus Christ alone.

“All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives the forgiveness of sins through His name.” Acts 10:43

Chapter 2: Does John 3:5-8 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?

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“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’“

Question: “Does John 3:5 teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation?”

Answer: As with any single verse or passage, we interpret it in light of what the Bible already teaches.

In the case of “water” baptism for salvation, the Bible is very clear that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by works of any kind. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
Therefore any interpretation which comes to the conclusion that water baptism or any other work of the believer is necessary for salvation is a faulty interpretation.

First, when first considering this passage, it is important to note that nowhere in the context is baptism even mentioned.

And while baptism is mentioned later in John 3:22-30, it is in a totally different location (Judea instead of Jerusalem) and time from Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus.

This is not to say Nicodemus would be unfamiliar with baptism, either from the Jewish practice of baptizing Gentile converts into Judaism, or from the ministry of John the Baptist.

However, reading these verses in context should not automatically give anyone any reason to assume Jesus was speaking of water baptism, unless someone was reading into the passage a preconceived doctrine or theology.

Of course, those who hold that water baptism is required for salvation understandably point to “born of water” as evidence. And as one person has put it, “Jesus describes it and tells him plainly how—by being born of water and the Spirit. This is a perfect description of water baptism!”

However, if Jesus had made such a statement, He would have contradicted numerous other Bible passages that make it clear that salvation is by faith and trust in Jesus Christ. (John 3:16; John 3:36; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

We should also not lose sight of the fact that when Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus, the practice of Christian baptism was not yet even in effect.

This is an important consideration when one asks those who believe water baptism is required for salvation why the thief on the cross did not need to be water baptized to be saved.

A common reply to that question is, “Well, the thief on the cross was still under the Old Covenant and therefore not subject to baptism. Thus, he was saved just like anyone else under the Old Covenant.”

Yet the very same people who say the thief did not need to be baptized because he was “under the Old Covenant” will use John 3:5 as “proof” that Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he must be water baptized to be saved, even though he too was still under the Old Covenant.

**Born of water and the Spirit**

So if “being born of water and the Spirit” is not referring to baptism in h2o, then what does it point to?

Traditionally, there have been two interpretations of this phrase. The first is that being “born of water” refers to natural birth (with water referring to the amniotic fluid that surrounds the baby in the womb) and that being born of the Spirit, indicating spiritual new birth.

While that is certainly a possible interpretation of the term “born of water” and would seem to fit the context of Nicodemus’ question about how a man could be born “when he is old,” we would argue that it is not the best interpretation of this passage.

After all, Jesus was not talking about the difference between natural birth and spiritual birth, but rather Nicodemus’ need to be “born from above” or spiritually “born again.”

The second common interpretation of this passage and the one that best fits the overall context views the phrase “born of water and the Spirit” describes the same spiritual birth through the Holy Spirit, or as can be read in the Greek text, "born of water and (kai) even the Spirit."
So when Jesus told Nicodemus that he must “be born of water and the Spirit,” He was not referring to two different births. Rather, he is referring to the same spiritual birth in two different ways.

In other words, Jesus’ reply was that being born again by the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite to entering the kingdom of God.

Therefore, the “water” mentioned in this verse is not literal h2o, but rather a reference to the Holy Spirit or the “living water” Jesus promised the woman at the well in John 4 and the people in Jerusalem in John 7:38-39.

It is the inward purification and renewal produced by the Holy Spirit that brings forth the dead sinner to new spiritual life. (See also Ezekiel 36:25-27; Titus 3:5)

Here, Paul used the same baptismal figure in Titus 3:5 and called it “the washing of regeneration” by the Holy Spirit, not water or h2o.

Water is often used symbolically in the Bible to refer to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying a believer, whereby God cleanses and purifies the believer in heart and soul. (see Isaiah 44:3; John 7:38-39).

Jesus also rebukes Nicodemus in John 3:10 by asking him: “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?”

This implies that what Jesus had told Nicodemus something that as a teacher he should have known and understood from the Old Testament.

So what is it that Nicodemus should have known, but did not understand?

It is what God had promised in the Old Testament that a time was coming when, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Jesus rebuked Nicodemus because he failed to recall one of the key Old Testament passages pertaining to God’s New Covenant with His people.(See also Jeremiah 31:33)

And Nicodemus should have been expecting this.

In other words, why would Jesus have rebuked Nicodemus for not understanding the need to be “born again” by water baptism considering the fact that this baptism had not been foretold in the Old Testament?

While we maintain that this verse does not teach water baptism is required for salvation, we should be careful not to neglect baptism’s importance. Water baptism is the believer’s outward sign or symbol of the Holy Spirit’s baptism, which takes place when one places faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3: Does Acts 2:38 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?

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"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

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**Question:** Does Acts 2:38 teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation?

**Answer:** As with any single verse or passage, we discern what it teaches by first filtering it through what we know the Bible teaches on the subject at hand.

In the case of baptism and salvation, the Bible is clear that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of any kind, including water baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So, any interpretation which comes to the conclusion that baptism, or any other work, is necessary for salvation, is a faulty interpretation.

Why, then, do some come to the conclusion that we must be baptized in order to be saved?

Often, the discussion of whether or not this passage teaches baptism is required for salvation centers around the Greek word *eis* that is translated “for” in this passage.

Those who hold to the belief that baptism is required for salvation are quick to point to this verse and the fact that it says “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” assuming that the word translated “for” means “in order to receive.”

However, in both Greek and English, there are many possible usages of the word “for.”

As an example, when one says “Take two aspirin for your headache,” it is obvious to everybody that it does not mean “take two aspirin in order to get a headache,” but instead to “take two aspirin because you have a headache.”

There are three possible meanings of the word “for” that might fit the context of Acts 2:38:

1—“in order to be, become, get, have, keep, etc.,”

2—“because of, as the result of”

3—“with regard to”

Since any one of the three meanings could fit the context of this passage, additional study is required in order to determine which one is correct.

First, we need to start by looking back to the original language and the meaning of the Greek word *eis*. This is a common Greek word used 1774 times in the New Testament and translated many different ways.

Like the English word “for” it can have several different meanings. So, again, we see at least two or three possible meanings of the passage, one that would seem to support that baptism is required for salvation and others that would not.

While both the meanings of the Greek word *eis* are seen in different passages of Scripture, noted Greek scholars, such as A.T. Robertson and J.R. Mantey, have maintained that the Greek preposition
eis in Acts 2:38 should be translated "because of" or "in view of," and not "in order to," or "for the purpose of."

One example of how this preposition is used in other Scriptures is seen in Matthew 12:41 where the word eis communicates the "result" of an action.

In this case it is said that the people of Nineveh "repented at the preaching of Jonah" (the word translated "at" is the same Greek word eis). Clearly, the meaning of this passage is that they repented "because of" or "as the result of" Jonah's preaching.

In the same way, it would be possible that Acts 2:38 is communicating the fact that they were to be baptized "as the result of" or "because" they already had believed and in doing so had already received forgiveness of their sins (John 1:12; John 3:14-18; John 5:24; John 11:25-26; Acts 10:43; Acts 13:39; Acts 16:31; Acts 26:18; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 1:12-14).

This interpretation of the passage is also consistent with the message recorded in Peter's next two sermons to unbelievers where he associates the forgiveness of sins with the act of repentance and faith in Christ without even mentioning water baptism (Acts 3:17-26; Acts 4:8-12).

In addition to Acts 2:38, there are three other verses where the Greek word eis is used in conjunction with the word "baptize" or "baptism."

The first of these is Matthew 3:11, "baptize you with water for repentance." Clearly the Greek word eis cannot mean "in order to get" in this passage. They were not baptized "in order to get repentance," but were "baptized because they had repented."

The second passage is Romans 6:3 where we have the phrase "baptized into (eis) His death." This again fits with the meaning "because of" or in "regard to." The third and final passage is 1 Corinthians 10:2 and the phrase "baptized into (eis) Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

Again, eis cannot mean "in order to get" in this passage because the Israelites were not baptized in order to get Moses to be their leader, but because he was their leader and had led them out of Egypt.

If one is consistent with the way the preposition eis is used in conjunction with baptism, we must conclude that Acts 2:38 is referring to their being baptized because they had received forgiveness of their sins.

Some other verses where the Greek preposition eis does not mean "in order to obtain" are Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 19:3; 1 Corinthians 1:15; and 12:13.

The grammatical evidence surrounding this verse and the preposition eis are clear that while both views on this verse are well within the context and the range of possible meanings of the passage, the majority of the evidence is in favor that the best possible definition of the word "for" in this context is either "because of" or "in regard to" and not "in order to get."

There is another grammatical aspect of this verse that we need to carefully consider—the change between the second person and third person between the verbs and pronouns in the passage.

For example, in Peter's command to repent and (also) be baptized, in the Greek the verb translated "repent" is in the second person plural while the verb "be baptized" is in the third person singular. When we couple this with the fact that the pronoun "your" in the phrase "forgiveness of your sins" is also second person plural, we begin to see an important distinction that is being made that helps us understand this passage.
While this may be hard to follow, the result of this change from second person plural to third person singular and back again would seem to connect the phrase "forgiveness of your sins" directly with the command to "repent."

Therefore, when you take into account the change in person and the plurality, essentially what you have is "You (plural) repent for the forgiveness of your (plural) sins, and let each one of you (singular) be baptized (singular)."

Or in other words: "You all repent for the forgiveness of all of your sins, and let each one of you be baptized."

Another error that is made by those who believe Acts 2:38 teaches baptism is required for salvation is what is sometimes called the Negative Inference Fallacy. Simply put, this is the idea that just because a statement is true, we cannot assume all opposites of that statement are true.

In other words, just because Acts 2:38 says 'repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins" it does not by necessity mean that if one repents, but is not baptized, he will not receive the forgiveness of sins.

Here is should be noted that there is an important difference between a condition of salvation and a requirement for salvation. The Bible is clear that belief is both a condition and a requirement, but the same cannot be said for water baptism.

The point is that Bible never says that if a man is not baptized in water that he will not be saved. If that were true, Jesus would never have been able to assure the criminal crucified with Him that he would be with Him in paradise that very day (Luke 23:39-43).

One might add any number of conditions to faith (which is required for salvation) and the person can still be saved. For example if a person believes, goes to church, and gives to the poor he will be saved.

However, the error occurs is if one assumes that these other conditions, i.e. baptism, going to church, giving to the poor, are also requirements for one to be saved.

While these may be the evidence of a person's salvation, they are not a requirement for salvation.

The fact that baptism is not required to receive forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit should also be evident by simply reading a little farther in the book of Acts. In Acts 10:43, Peter tells Cornelius that "through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

Up until this point, nothing has been mentioned about being baptized. And yet, Peter connects believing in Christ with the act of receiving forgiveness for sins. The next thing that happens is, having believed Peter's message about Christ, the "Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message" (Acts 10:44).

It is only after they had believed, and therefore received forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that Cornelius and his household were baptized with water (Acts 10:47-48).

The context and the passage are very clear; Cornelius and his household received both forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit before they were ever water baptized. In fact, the reason Peter allowed them to be baptized was that they showed evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit "just as Peter and the rest of the Jewish believers” had in Acts chapter 2.

*(Added note from cofcdilemma.org)*
Another point that must be considered is whether or not the baptism of Acts chapter 2 is referring to "water" or "Holy Spirit" baptism.

In Acts chapter one Jesus said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Once again we are making a distinction between real, actual, or Holy Spirit baptism and rite, ritual or water baptism, which gives testimony to it.

The Scripture continues and tells us that when the day of Pentecost came, the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The God-fearing Jews were amazed and perplexed over this and began to ask, "What does this mean?"

Peter of course tells them that they are not drunk as they might suppose, but rather that this very event- the pouring out of the Holy Spirit- was spoken of by the prophet Joel:

Verse 17 " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people,...' "

Verse 18 " '...I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.' "

Verse 33 " Exalted to the right hand of God, he (Jesus) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

The point of all this is that Jesus predicted that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit back in Acts chapter one, verses 4 and 5.

Another example can be found in Acts chapter 11 when the apostle Peter recounts the conversion of Cornelius to the Jewish believers who were skeptical that the Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews first.

He says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning (i.e. Acts chapter 2).

"Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' Acts 11:15-16"

Again, the only reason Peter allowed them to be "baptized with water" was that they had already received Holy Spirit baptism just as the Jewish disciples had in Acts chapter 2, and note that Peter does refer to the Holy Spirit event as a baptism.

Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this we know he meant the Spirit, "whom those who believed in him were later to receive." (John 7:38-39)

So was the baptism of Acts chapter 2 "water" or "Holy Spirit" baptism?

The Bible teaches that when we come to trust Jesus Christ as Savior, we are baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13)
As new believers we are “water” baptized in obedience to our Lord’s command, which gives testimony to our true, actual, Holy Spirit baptism. (Matthew 28:19)

Other references to consider:

Isaiah 44:3, Ezekiel 36:24-27, Joel 2:28-29

1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:26-27, Eph. 1:13-14, Col. 2:11-14, Titus 3:4-

**Chapter 4: Does Acts 22:16 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?**

**Question:** Does Acts 22:16 teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation?

**Answer:** The Churches of Christ often read into the text Acts 22:16 to explain why Paul is told to go into the city “to find out what he must do.”

Here, the Churches of Christ often make the assumption that he is going to be told what he must do (and add the words) “to be saved.” In other words notice that “to be saved” is not in the text.

However, looking back over the 3 accounts given in Acts that tell about Paul’s conversion, the context of “what Paul must do” was that he was chosen to be an instrument to carry the Lord’s name ‘to the Gentiles and to their kings and before the people of Israel’. In other words, to be consistent with the Church of Christ pretext, Paul must be water baptized and be a minister to the Gentiles in order to be saved.

However, Paul tells us in Galatians 1:11-12 that he did not hear the gospel from Ananias, but rather that he heard it directly through a revelation from Jesus Christ:

“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

So Paul heard the gospel on the road to Damascus, which was before Ananias came to pray for him to receive his sight (Acts 9:17).

In regards to Acts 22:16, after Ananias tells Paul that he will be a witness to all men of what he has seen and heard, he says:

"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”

Here, at least looking at the first part of the sentence, the passage does seem to say that water baptism will wash away Paul’s sins. However, we need to consider the rest of the sentence which says, “calling on His name.”

Paul uses this same phrase in Romans 10:13 to describe someone receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord:

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

And notice that nowhere in Romans 10 is water baptism even mentioned.
Here it should be pointed out that in Acts 22:1 the “calling” used in this passage is a aorist participle in the Greek, which means that its action (the action of “calling on the name of the Lord”) precedes the action of the main verb in the sentence of “be baptized.”

In other words, a literal translation of the verse is, “Arise, get yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling on His name.”

The point is that we get our sins washed away by calling on the name of Jesus Christ, not by water baptism. Once again, “water” baptism is a sign or symbol that follows the salvation of the believer, not causes it.

Chapter 5: Does Galatians 3:27 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?

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Groups that believe that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation often turn to Galatians 3:27 as one of their “proof texts” for the view that baptism is necessary for salvation.

In doing so they are ignoring the context of the passage as well as the overall context of Scripture to try to force their pre-conceived theological view on this passage.

In order to determine if this passage really supports baptismal regeneration, one simply needs to read the immediate context to know that it does not.

The overall context of Galatians is centered on Paul’s rebuke that some of the Galatians were turning from the one true gospel to another false gospel that could not save them (Galatians 1:6-10).

The false gospel they were embracing was one that mixed God’s grace with works of the law, including circumcision, as a requirement for being saved, much like those who add baptism as a requirement for salvation.

Paul’s message in Galatians is very, very clear—we are justified not “by the works of the law but by faith in Christ” (Galatians 2:16).

This context of justification by faith alone in Christ alone is seen throughout the first three chapters of Galatians and is reinforced in Galatians 3:26, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

This verse, along with all other passages of Scripture dealing with salvation, makes it clear that salvation is “through faith in Christ Jesus,” and since, for baptism to have any meaning at all, it must always be preceded by faith, we can know that it is faith in Christ that saves us not the baptism that follows faith.

While baptism is important as a way of identifying us with Christ, it only has meaning if it comes from saving faith which always comes first.

Galatians 3:27 says, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Question: Is there any reason from the context of this passage to assume that this is speaking of water baptism?

The obvious answer is no.

There is no contextual evidence on which to draw that conclusion.
We know from Scripture that there is more than one type of baptism taught in the New Testament (Hebrews 6:2), so why should it be assumed this is speaking of water baptism?

The question we need to answer from Scripture is, “How do we get baptized into Christ?” Or another way of asking it is “what makes a person a Christian?” Or maybe, “What is the single most important difference between a Christian and a non-Christian?”

The answer to these questions is found in Romans 8:9, “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not his.”

Scripture is very clear that the determining factor for whether or not one is a Christian is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

With that truth in mind let’s look at another passage that speaks of being “baptized” into Christ.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all be made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

What is it that makes one a Christian?

It is being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

What baptism is it that puts us into Christ, or makes us a part of Christ’s body?

It is the baptism “by one Spirit.”

Clearly, the baptism that 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Galatians 3:27 are speaking of is not water baptism at all.

It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit whereby we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13-14) and are made part of Christ’s body as we are indwelt by His Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised His disciples before He left them that He would send them “another helper,” the Holy Spirit who “dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-18).

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is what baptizes us into the body of Christ, as seen clearly in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

John the Baptist prophesied that, while he was sent to “baptize with water,” Jesus was the One who would “baptize with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33-34).

It is that baptism, the point that we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that “baptizes” us into the body of Christ. Galatians 3:27 is not referring to water baptism at all.

Water baptism is symbolic of what is accomplished when we are baptized into one body by one Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is what matters.

When we receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as promised by Christ is when we become part of the body of Christ or are “baptized into Christ.”
Those who try to force baptismal regeneration into Galatians 3:27 have no scriptural grounds for doing so.

**Recommended Resources:** Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ by Schriener and Wright

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**Chapter 6: Does Ephesians 4:5 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?**

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Ephesians 4:4-6 says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Since there are different "baptisms" referred to in the New Testament, it can be a bit confusing when we read about "one baptism." The word baptize means "to dip, to plunge, to immerse." However we must look at the context to determine what medium (i.e. water or the Holy Spirit) that we are being ‘dipped, plunged, or immersed’ into.

Generally speaking, from Scripture there are two different types of baptisms:

Rite, ritual, or "water" baptism,

And true, actual, or Holy Spirit baptism.

One baptism is accomplished in water; the other is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism was commanded by Jesus for all of His followers (Matthew 28:18).

Here it should be noted that water baptism does not save us; faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ is what saves us (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9).

Thus water baptism is an outward, public indication of an inward change; It is a wonderful picture of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection in us.

Being immersed in water symbolizes the cleansing of our hearts and the washing away of our sin by the blood of Jesus (Acts 22:16).

Through water baptism, believers publicly proclaim their testimony that they have been born again by the grace of God.

In contrast to this, 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of true, actual Holy Spirit baptism: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

This spiritual baptism "into Christ" is performed by the Holy Spirit the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ for salvation and is born again (John 3:5; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 8:12).

We respond to the Holy Spirit’s drawing and are born into God’s family (John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 6:19).
By this "baptism," we are identified with the death and resurrection of Jesus; from then on, we consider ourselves "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20).

We choose to lose ourselves and be immersed in Him (Matthew 16:24). And it is the Holy Spirit that makes this happen. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by John the Baptist, who said, 'I baptize you with water, but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

No one understood what John meant by this until after Jesus had ascended back into heaven (Acts 1:9).

Jesus had promised the disciples that He would send "the Comforter" (John 14:26; 15:26; Luke 24:49).

His followers were to wait in Jerusalem until the "promise from the Father" came (Acts 1:4-5).

That promise came in Acts 2.

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, and they were never the same again. They were bold in their witness, empowered to perform miracles, willing to endure persecution, and all but one died a martyr’s death. The church had begun.

Throughout the book of Acts, that baptism by the Holy Spirit was repeated as people came to know Jesus, both Jew and Gentile, and served to unify the church as the Jewish believers realized that the Holy Spirit was poured out on their Gentile brothers as well.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers about “one baptism,” he was reminding them that, regardless of their background or nationality, they all served the same Lord, shared the same faith, and had experienced the same baptism.

He could have been referring to water baptism; i.e., all believers have the same testimony of salvation and have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But he could just as also have been referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit; i.e., all believers have been placed into the Body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Either way, the emphasis of "one baptism" is unity among believers.

The Holy Spirit works to unify believers and provides assurance that they are indeed children of God (Romans 8:16; Ephesians 1:13-14).

By reminding the church that they all had a similar testimony and that they were all partakers in the same Holy Spirit, Paul encouraged them to work together for the cause of Christ so that the message of redemption would continue to spread throughout the world (Matthew 28:19).

Chapter 7:

Does 1 Peter 3:21 teach that (water) baptism is necessary for salvation?

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As with any single verse or passage, we discern what it teaches by first filtering it through what we know the Bible teaches on the subject at hand. In the case of baptism and salvation, the Bible is clear that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not by works of any kind, including water baptism (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So, any interpretation which comes to the conclusion that baptism, or any other act as necessary for salvation, is a faulty interpretation.

Those who believe that baptism is required for salvation are quick to use 1 Peter 3:21 as a proof text verse because it states, “baptism now saves you”.

Was Peter really saying that it is “water” baptism that saves you?

If he were, he would be contradicting many other passages of Scripture that clearly show people being saved (as evidenced by their receiving the Holy Spirit) prior to being baptized or without being baptized at all, like the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43.

Another good example of someone who was saved before being “water” baptized is Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:44-45.

We know that they were already saved before being water baptized because they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was the evidence of their salvation in Acts 11:15-16; 15:7-9.

In fact, it was that evidence of their salvation which was the very reason that Peter commanded them to be “water” baptized in Acts 10:47.

Again, the Churches of Christ tend to think of baptism as being first and only with h2o or water, as though the biblical definition of baptism (to dip, plunge, or immerse) implies being dipped, plunged or immersed in the medium of water.


*Here in 1 Peter 3:21 the question that should be asked is whether or not Peter was referring to h2o or “water” baptism, or true or actual “Holy Spirit” baptism.*

Considering the context of 1 Peter 3:21, the baptism the writer had in mind is the real or actual baptism of the Holy Spirit:

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype (i.e. superior water) 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...”

The Scripture often refers to the Holy Spirit as “the living water” that God provides, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

In John 4 Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water (h2o) will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them (the Holy Spirit) will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
Also in John 7 Jesus said, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive.

Thus, it seems apparent “this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you” is talking about the anti-type (or superior) “water” baptism, i.e. the baptism of the Holy Spirit baptism that now saves you.

May I also point out that if the writer were simply referring to h2o baptism here, then the wrong people in this passage were “water” baptized. For just as the example of Pharaoh and his army in 1 Cor. 10:1-4, the only ones who had h2o baptism applied to them were those who perished in the flood!

So while it is true that water baptism points us to the spiritual reality of the believer’s Holy Spirit baptism, we dare not be trusting in it (the symbol) to save us. For just as there are those within the body of the church who administer the rite of water baptism to new believers (Matt. 28:18-19), it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that actually places us into the body of Christ:

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:13

FAQ/ Apologetics Section- Part 3

Answers for other Church of Christ doctrinal problems:

Chapter One: What is faith? Isn’t believing a work of the believer?

Chapter Two: Is the doctrine of salvation by faith alone a Calvinistic doctrine?

Chapter Three: What is the controversy over instrumental music in worship?

Chapter Four: What is the controversy over having a “correct” church name?

Chapter Five: How does a person obey the gospel?

Chapter Six: Show one place where the words "faith alone" is found in Scripture

Chapter Seven: What about James 2:24 and 'not justified by faith only’?

Chapter One: What is faith? Isn’t believing a work of the believer?

Evangelical Christianity views biblical faith (i.e. to take as true, or to believe as true) as having three primary or essential elements. Bible scholars sometimes give these elements Latin names called the Notitia, Assensus, and Fiducia.

In summary:
a) *Notitia* has to do with knowledge or content.
b) *Assensus* has to do with believing the information *given* as factual.
c) *Fiducia* has to do with trust or reliance.

Here it is relatively easy to understand how these 3 basic elements of faith are interrelated to one another.

For example, it is impossible for someone to have faith in a person like the President of the United States if that person does not know or have the information of who the President of the United States is -i.e. the *Notitia*.

Second, it is impossible for someone to force or will themselves to have faith in the President of the United States if they refuse to believe the information that the individual *is* the President of the United States -i.e. the *Assensus*.

And finally, even if someone has the information that an individual is the President and believes that someone *is* the President, because of their personal or political views, they still may not have faith in that person as President -i.e. the *Fiducia*.

Authentic faith or trust requires all three elements of *Notitia*, *Assensus* and *Fiducia*.

**So all we need is a little faith?**

Telling someone to “Just have faith” is of little value to anyone.

What? 'Have faith *in* faith'?

It’s not ‘faith in faith’ that brings justification to the believer, but rather it is the object of our faith that brings justification—Jesus Christ.

Everyone exercises faith to some extent every day.

However the difference between the believer and the non-believer is not the *fact* of faith, but rather the *object* of their faith. The unsaved person may trust or rely in themselves, or in their own moral and religious abilities and conduct.

But the Christian puts their faith, trust, and reliance in the person of Jesus Christ.

A biblical example might be when someone came from the household of Jairus, the synagogue ruler, to tell him that his daughter had just died.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus heard this He said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid -just believe.”

*Believe?!!

*Believe what?!!

No Jairus. Not believe "what".

Believe in "Who".

Believe *in* Jesus.
Again, faith always has an object.

The object of the believer's faith is the Savior.

**But isn't placing faith in Christ a "work" that we do?**

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Our salvation depends solely upon Jesus Christ.

He is our substitute who took sin's penalty (2 Corinthians 5:21), He is our Savior from sin (John 1:29), He is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The work necessary to provide salvation was fully accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself. He lived a perfect life, took God's punishment for sin that we deserved, and rose again from the dead (Hebrews 10:12).

The Bible is quite clear that our own works do not help merit salvation. We are saved "not because of righteous things we had done" (Titus 3:5), "Not by works" (Ephesians 2:9), "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10).

This means that offering sacrifices, keeping the commandments, going to church, being (water) baptized, or any other good deeds are incapable of saving anyone.

No matter how "good" we are, we can never measure up to God's standard of holiness. Our our righteous acts are filthy rages to God (Romans 3:23; Matthew 19:17; Isaiah 64:6).

The Bible is just as clear that salvation is conditional; God does not save everyone.

The one condition for salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. Nearly 200 times in the New Testament, faith (belief or trust) is declared to be the sole condition for salvation (John 1:12; Acts 16:31).

One day, some people asked Jesus what they could do to please God: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus immediately points them to faith: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:28-29).

So, the question was about God's requirements (plural), and Jesus' answer (singular) is that God's requirement is that you believe in Him.

Grace is God giving us something we cannot earn or deserve. According to Romans 11:6, "works" of any kind destroys grace because the idea is that a worker earns payment, while the recipient of grace simply receives the item as a gift, unearned.

Since salvation is all of grace, it cannot be earned. Faith in Jesus Christ therefore is a non-work. Faith cannot truly be considered a "work," or else it would destroy grace. (See also Romans 4; Abraham's salvation was dependent on faith in God, as opposed to any work he performed.)

Suppose someone anonymously sent me a check for $1,000,000. The money is mine if I want it, but I still must endorse the check. In no way can signing my name be considered earning the million dollars. Thus, the endorsement is a non-work. I can never boast about becoming a millionaire through sheer effort or my own business savvy.

No, the million dollars was simply a gift, and signing my name was the way to receive it.
Similarly, placing faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to receive God's generous gift of eternal life, and placing faith in the only One who can save cannot be considered a work worthy of the gift.

True faith also cannot be considered a work because true faith involves a rejection of our own works to order to trust in Christ. True faith has as its object Jesus Christ Himself and in what He did and accomplished on our behalf. Matthew 11:28-29; Hebrews 4:10

To take this a step further, true faith cannot be considered a work because even faith is a gift from God, not something we produce on our own.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8

Praise the Lord for His power to save and for His grace that makes salvation a reality!

**Recommended Resource:** Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification by R.C. Sproul.

### Chapter Two: Is the doctrine of salvation by faith alone a Calvinistic doctrine?

It is interesting to note that the Churches of Christ often "write-off" the doctrine of justification by faith alone simply because they are convinced it is a "Calvinist" doctrine.

Church of Christ evangelist Gene Taylor of Centerville Road Church of Christ of Tallahassee Florida wrote the following in his introduction to the doctrine of Calvinism:

"Whenever someone contends that a) faith is a gift from God b) affirms that he has been saved by faith only c) embraces false teachings about the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of sinners d) and believes it is impossible for a child of God to sin and be eternally lost, he has fallen victim to the Calvinist system of doctrine."

This is amazing because when one compares these points with the actual teachings of Calvinism and the "free-will" (i.e. Arminianism) view, one would think the only difference between the two from what Mr. Taylor writes is the "P" of TULIP and the perseverance of the saints.

In other words, the Churches of Christ may be surprised to learn that BOTH Calvinists and "free-will" types believe in the doctrine of the fall AND the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

However, what is actually debated between Calvinists and "free-will" types is not the dynamics of the fall nor the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, but rather how resistible God's grace is to man- i.e. the doctrine of election.

Here, the point of contention is that if God calls you- *must* you respond positively to His gospel, or in the final analysis does man reserve the ability within himself to reject the God and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and thus be lost and eternally condemned?

At this point the Arminian will say yes to "free-will" while the Calvinist answers no.

However, it is the "Pelagian" or Church of Christ view that is being argued against here.

Pelagianism rejects the doctrine of the fall and rejects the teaching that man has a "sin nature" or predisposition to sin and to do evil. In contrast it believes that man has the ability within himself to
respond positively to all the necessary moral and religious commands and laws of God in order to be saved.

Thus, making the same assumption about human ability, the Church of Christ therefore rejects the doctrine of salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ, believing anyone can be saved through "Patternism" or in other words- New Testament law-keeping.

Again, both Calvinists and Arminians or "free-will" types reject this view.

Both believe that because man is fallen, has a sinful nature, and therefore lacks the moral and religious ability to save himself "by New Testament Law-Keeping", the only hope for sinful man is to place faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in Him alone to do what we could not possibly do in our own sinful selves.

Chapter Three: What is the controversy over instrumental music in worship?

Since there may be those who are unfamiliar with the objections the Churches of Christ raise against the use of instrumental music, we must understand that it is a matter of biblical authority.

Here the question that must be answered is if the scripture allows for its use.

And two of the most often sighted and quoted scriptures used by the Churches of Christ are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which taken together says 'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord.'

It is from these passages of scripture that the Churches of Christ draw the conclusion that, although (vocal) singing is authorized in worship, the use of musical (mechanical) instruments is not.

And if you missed the phrase, 'sing and make music in your heart'—it is here that the Churches of Christ are often very insistent that it is only with our hearts that we can make "acceptable music" unto the Lord.

And never mind all the examples given to us from the book of Psalms. That precedent (they believe) was given only under the Old Testament law system.

Therefore, any "musical instruments" outside of our own hearts, must be avoided and excluded because of a perceived lack of scriptural authority.

Explaining biblical idioms

It is at this point of the instrumental music debate that I would like to introduce the subject of idiomatic expressions.

And for those who may not be familiar with this term, you will certainly recognize them immediately as those phrases used in any given language which cannot be understood by an individual unless the intended meaning is known or can be discerned by the listener.

For example, some very common American idioms are "he put his foot in his mouth" and "I want to put a bug in your ear." Obviously these kinds of expressions are not intended to be taken literally (thank goodness), for what is actually being said here is that "he said something foolish" and "I have an idea I want you to think about."
Now it should be of no surprise then that idioms are used in the scripture as well.

For example the Hebrew phrase "he rested with his fathers" and "they will become like women" actually means that "he died" and that "they will be afraid or terrified."

And don't miss the fact that if we were to take these verses (idioms) literally, we will actually miss the real intent of the passage.

It is here, though, that I would like to ask if the phrase 'sing and make music in your heart' is to be taken literally, or should it be understood as a biblical idiom? For if this passage is intended to be taken word for word, then I must point out that God has given us a command we cannot possibly obey.

Why? Because in a literal sense, we do not have the ability or physical capability to sing or to make music inside our own hearts.

Not with our physical hearts.

Not with our minds.

Therefore, I think it should be apparent that we ought to view this verse as a biblical idiom. For if we take this passage literally, again by definition, we will miss the actual intent of the passage.

**So what is the message?**

Sometimes, when we come across an unclear or difficult section of scripture, we can gain additional insight by looking at similar passages to help us understand the spirit of what is being taught. For we know that scripture when viewed in its proper context it cannot contradict itself.

And certainly the last thing we want to do is build a theology based upon a single verse that has been misunderstood and taken out of its intended context.

With this in mind, please consider Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 in light of the following passages of scripture:

"I will sing and make music." Psalms 57:7

"I will sing and make music with all my soul." Psalms 108:1

"My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts." Isaiah 65:14

"Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord." Ephesians 5:19

"(Sing) psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

After viewing these passages, and given the fact that God had previously approved the use of musical instruments in worship in the Old Testament, there is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that God has now "narrowed down" the use of musical instruments in psalms to vocal singing only, because both passages authorize the use of psalms without modifying the use, non-use, or precedent of using musical instruments in worship.
Chapter Four: What is the controversy over having a “correct” church name?

Edited from Bob Ross’ book "Campbellism- It’s History and Heresies". Used by permission.

One brother put it rightly when he wrote: "They (the Campbellites) have been quarreling over a name for their baby ever since it was born."

They have called themselves “Reformers,” “Restorationalists,” Disciples of Christ,” “Christians,” “Christian Church,” “Church of Christ,” and even a few other titles. Barton W. Stone contended for the name “Christian,” while Alexander Campbell thought "Disciples" was better.

Apparently there was quite a bit of “heat” between Campbell and Stone on this point.

The matter of having the correct name is still an important issue in the Churches of Christ and many do not believe that one can be saved unless he wears the right name. Some will even go so far as to say that “The” must not even be attached to “Church of Christ” while others will not even allow any additional items to be added which would identify its locality.

For example, “Main Street Church of Christ” would be considered wrong.

Of course, not all Campbellites believe alike on these foregoing restrictions, but all of them are concerned about the name they wear. And often they will cite some verses in the Bible which they believe teach the wearing of a “correct” name.

Here, we will take a look at of some of those passages that are often used.

Matthew 16:18: “... and on this rock I will build My church.”

Campbellites reason from this verse that since Christ said “My church,” it must have been named after Jesus Christ.

However, you will notice that there is no name given in the verse and there is no command to wear a name in the verse. When we read “My church” it simply tells us whose church it is.

One may say “I will build by fence,” but does these mean he will place a name on the fence which reads, “The Fence of Mr. Jones”?

Certainly not.

Someone may build and own a fence, but it does not mean that the person will provide a name for his fence.

Acts 4:12: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Question: Does this verse command us to hang out a name over the church building?
If so, what is that name?

Isn’t it amazing how the Campbellites grab on to this verse to justify their “name,” yet miss the great doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ alone which is the emphasis of the apostle?

There is not one word about wearing a name in the verse, yet the great doctrine of salvation through the person of Jesus Christ is lost.

**Romans 16:16** “... The churches of Christ greet you.”

This is the only verse that even comes close to the Campbellite “name,” yet it does not teach their notion. Here “the churches of Christ” is in the possessive sense indicating ownership and the verse simply says that ‘the churches owned by Christ greets those of you in Rome.’

Even if this verse were giving a name to wear, the Campbellite name would be wrong, for the word “church” is not a proper translation, much like the word “baptize” is not a proper translation.

Even Alexander Campbell recognized this fact and in his translation of the New Testament, he rendered Romans 16:16 as follows: “The congregations of Christ salute you.”

Of the word "church," Campbell said: “Church, or kirk, is an abbreviation of the words *kuriou oikos*, 'the house of the Lord' and does not translate the term ekklesia.” (Living Oracles, page 55).

All Greek authorities tell us that it is the word "ekkesia" means assembly or congregation. The word “church” like the word “baptize” is in the King James translation because King James’ rules to the translators demanded that it be used.

In view of these facts, the title "Church of Christ" is incorrect, unless Campbellites can prove that “the tradition of men” is acceptable, and then they would still have to produce a command that this particular title should be worn.

**Ephesians 3:15:** “...from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

Campbellites teach that this verse means the church is to wear a name. Yet no such thing is taught here. The Greek of this verse is “each” or “every” family, not the whole family. So it is not referring to the idea of a universal church, but to every family of creation.

Furthermore, it is not Christ of whom each family is “named,” but God the Father (vrs. 14). The word “is named” simply refers to the fact hat God is the source of all existing families; He is their creator and sustainer.

There is no title for the church, nor a command to wear a title, stated in the verse.

**Acts 11:26:** “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”

This happened about eleven years or so after the day of Pentecost, the day on which Campbellites contend the church was born, and one was called “Christian,” nor were churches named “Church of Christ,” during those eleven years.

The Bible says “the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.” Yet we will agree there were Christians (followers of Christ) before they were ever called “Christians.”

This ought to be enough to prove that one can be saved without wearing a certain brand name.
"We are the church you read about in the Bible."

Over and over again you hear this one. “Investigate and be a member of no church but the one you can read about in the Bible,” they say. Well, that’s good advice, but the Campbellite church is not mentioned in the Bible!

Someone might say, “Haven’t you read about the churches of Christ in the Bible?” Yes we have. But tacking that expression on a sign or building does not make a group of heretics who follow the interpretations and doctrines of Alexander Campbell & Company a church of Christ.

Understand then, we are not objecting to the use of terms in order to designate certain items for identification’s sake. But we are objecting to the false claim made by Campbellites when they say they “call Bible things by Bible names.”

The truth is, they are just like the rest of the religious world, using “non scriptural” terms to designate certain items. For example, their “gospel meeting,” for instance is no more a Bible name than “revival meeting,” or “Bible school” or “Bible Study” is no more a “Bible name” than “Sunday School” or “VBS.”

Their claim is foolish and ridiculous and an insult to human intelligence.

Are Campbellites a Denomination?

Another favorite hobby horse of the Campbellites is their harping about “not being a denomination.” They condemn “denominationalism” and claim they are not a denomination, but simply the “Church of Christ.”

Well, even if they were the church of Christ, they would be a denomination.

What does “denomination” mean?

Webster gives these definitions: 1. Act of denominating or naming. 2. A name, designation, or title. 3. A class or society of individuals, called by the same name; a sect.

On every one of these points the Campbellites are a denomination. They are denominated by a name: “Church of Christ,” “Disciples of Christ,” Christian Church.” They are also distinguished as a denomination by their doctrines.

Furthermore, they have definite bounds to their religious associations, recognizing only groups of like faith, thus they are a particular “class” or “society.”

It is just another appeal to ignorance for Campbellites to try and pan off the notion they are not a distinct religious denomination. Actually, they are one of the most rigidly sectarian denomination in existence, often teaching that outside their religious movement, there is no salvation!

To illustrate their sectarian character, if you believe exactly as they believe, but used a piano instead of a tuning fork, it is often taught that you would go to hell, or if you wore “Christian” on the church building instead of “Church of Christ,” you would likewise perish!

Chapter Five: How does a person obey the gospel?

How does a person obey the gospel?

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul reminds us of what the gospel or Good News message is- that
Jesus Christ came, died on the cross, paid the penalty for our sins, that He was buried, and that God raised Him from the dead-

"Christ died for OUR sins...that He was buried...that He was raised on the third day...this is what we preach...and this is what you believed." 1 Cor. 15:3-11

This is the gospel.

Here both evangelical Christianity and the Church of Christ believe that the gospel message found in 1 Corinthians 15 is (or at least is part of) the gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, biblical speaking, how does a person respond to or 'obey' the gospel?

Here, the Church of Christ asserts that obeying the gospel means 'being obedient to all the necessary moral and religious requirements of the New Testament', or 'obeying those commands one must do in order to be saved'.

And the difference between the saved and the unsaved according to the Church of Christ is whether or not a person has obeyed ALL OF THE NECESSARY moral and religious requirements of the New Testament.

However, when one looks into the Scripture and looks into the context of 1 Cor. 15 what it means to 'obey the gospel', we find that a person obeys the gospel when they believe the gospel message:

"This is what we preached, and this is what you believed" 1 Cor. 15:11

Consider the following passages:

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" Romans 10:16 (Note: They have not all obeyed because not all have believed)

"You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" Galatians 5:7 (Note: The context of 'being hindered from obeying the truth' is that they had believed the lie that works of the law were also a requirement as faith in Christ)

"...Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you HAVE purified yourselves by obeying the truth (i.e. by believing the message) love one another deeply, from the heart." 1 Peter 1:21-22

"Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient..." 1 Peter 2:27 (Note: The contrast is being made between those who believe and those who are disobedient- i.e. those who refuse to believe)

So while we will see those in the Church of Christ go from one "obey" pretext verse to another to 'prove' we obey the gospel by being obedient to the necessary moral and religious requirements of the New Testament-

If we look at the context of these verses to see what it means to 'obey the gospel', we find that we obey the gospel by believing the gospel message.

So what is the gospel?

The Gospel or the Good News message is that Jesus Christ came to this earth, died on the cross, paid the FULL penalty for our sin, was buried, and that God raised Him from the dead.

This is the gospel.

God's promise is that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, trusting Him as Savior, WILL NOT PERISH but has everlasting life.
So have you obeyed the gospel?
That is,
Have YOU believed God's promise that Jesus Christ saves you?

* * *
"...If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son...And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son...Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life...I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5:9-12

Chapter Six: Show one place where "faith alone" is found in Scripture

A person challenged to show one verse in Scripture that 'salvation is by faith alone' replied with the following:

Considering the Church of Christ's own standard of "necessary inference" a person can identify this as plain as the nose on his face, for there are at least 154 passages throughout the New Testament which tell us salvation is by placing faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Consider for a moment the following passages:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16

"Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears my Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life." John 5:24

"...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, lest anyone should boast." Eph. 2:8

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." Galatians 2:15-16

These verses and provided passages plainly and clearly state:

* a direct relationship between salvation/justification and faith- with nothing else being mentioned in the sentence or context, and/or,

* a direct eternal benefit from faith- with nothing else being mentioned in the sentence or the context;

* therefore, since nothing else other than "faith" is mentioned in the thoughts or context being communicated-
Faith Alone or "faith only" is what is implied and required.

To further illustrate the above reality, as well as to show how 'selective' those in the Church of Christ are in applying their own standard, this individual applied their "faith only" argument to the illustration of Noah building the ark- with gopher wood "only":

*Genesis 6:14-16*

"Make yourself an ark of gopherwood (only); make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch (only). And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits (only). Its width fifty cubits (only), and its height thirty cubits (only). You shall make a window for the ark, and shall finish it (only) to a cubit from above (only); and set the door of the ark in its side (only). You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks (only)."

His point: It's utterly ridiculous for the Church of Christ to assert its 'no verse in scripture specifically says we are saved by faith-only' argument when honest consideration is given to the biblical verse(s), text, and context of those passages. To refuse the plainly stated truth from the Word of God that salvation is simply by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone is like saying:

'Noah was told to build an ark with gopher wood, but the Scripture NEVER specifies that he was to "only" use gopher wood, cover the ark with pitch "only", make its length three hundred cubits "only", make its width fifty cubits "only", its height thirty cubits "only", make a window "only", or a door "only", or to make lower, second, and third decks "only".'

Chapter Seven: What about James 2:24 and 'not justified by faith only'?

Members of the Church of Christ will sometimes cite James 2:24 as 'proof' that the believer's justification is not by faith alone. Here they will point out that 'this is the only passage in the Bible where these two words (faith & alone) come together, and the Bible is very clear when it says that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.'

Keep in mind that context of James 2:24 is dealing with Abraham, and this verse concerns the time when Abraham was about to offer up his son Isaac upon the altar.

And here James asks the rhetorical question, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"

It is here that I'd like to pose a question as it relates to the context.

Is this passage talking about Abraham's (forensic or legal) justification where God 'deemed, or declared Abraham as righteous', or is the passage talking about Abraham being justified (shown, deemed, or declared as righteousness) before men?

This is a very relevant question because Romans 4 tells us that Abraham was justified before God long before Isaac was even born,

And it wasn't by his works, but rather by his faith!

The point of all this is that the justification found in James 2:24 concerns a completely different time, circumstance, and event, which was over 20 years after the justification where "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."
James 2:24 says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"

Yes, Abraham was justified by his works-

But was he justified (shown, deemed, or declared "as righteous") before God or before men?

Anyone who understands James 2:24 to be talking about Abraham's legal or forensic justification before God has a real problem, because when Paul talks about Abraham's justification in Romans 4, he makes it very clear that justification before God is not by works:

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Romans 4:3

Unless Scripture contradicts itself-- and it doesn't since it is God's inerrant Word, James 2:24 cannot be talking about Abraham's legal or forensic justification before God, but rather about being 'shown, deemed, or declared as righteous' before men.

Looking at the context, Abraham's justification before men by works "fulfilled" his positional justification before God, which was by faith years before.

In other words, because of his faith God 'deemed and declared Abraham as righteous', and he was righteous in his position; this was a legal and binding act. However, when Abraham offered up Isaac, he was living his life experience before men in a manner that was consistent with his position.

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" James 2:21-24

But there's another point that relates to the words only and alone.

The NKJV reads: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."

The Greek word translated only here is monon, which is an adverb. Adverbs modify adjectives, verbs, or other adverbs. Adverbs do not modify nouns. Adjectives modify nouns.

We know that this is an adverb (monon) and not an adjective (monhs) since Greek has a different forms for each word.

Hodges makes this comment concerning the adverb monon used here in James 2:24

"The Greek adverb "only" (monon) ... does not qualify (i.e., modify) the word faith, since the form would then have been monhs. As an adverb, however, it modifies the verb justified implied in the second clause ["and not only justified by faith"]. In other words, James is saying that a by-faith justification is not the only kind of justification there is. There is also a by-works justification. The former type is before God; the latter type is before men." 1
Thus, we might paraphrase the sense of Jas 2:24 in this way: 'You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only (justified) by faith.'

Hodges also makes a helpful observation that this distinction is also found in Paul’s writings in Romans 4:2. The apostle tells us that there is such a thing as "works" justification before men, but not before God:

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Thus, the only way a man can be justified before God is by faith.

References:

1) Zane C. Hodges, The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 71


FAQ/ Apologetics Section- Part 4

Questions for those in the Churches of Christ:

Chapter One: Why isn’t Romans 6:1 ever asked in the Churches of Christ?

Chapter Two: A question about baptism and the "5 step plan of salvation".

Chapter Three: What is the purpose of the Old Testament Law?

Chapter Four: Does the Church of Christ reverse faith and repentance?

Chapter Five: How can a person know if they are attending a traditional Church of Christ?

Chapter One: Why isn’t Romans 6:1 ever asked in the Churches of Christ??

The apostle Paul asks an interesting question in Romans 6, "What then? Shall we continue to live in sin?"

So when was the last time you've heard anyone, after hearing the Church of Christ gospel message, ask this question?

Think about it.

If we are saved by hearing, believing, repenting from sin, confessing the name of Christ, being baptized in h2o, keeping ourselves saved by continuing to live a moral and religious "good" life...
Would the reaction to that message be 'What then? Shall we continue to live in sin?'

Of course not.

Any infraction or failure of performing all the necessary "steps" or moral/religious requirements would endanger that person's salvation.

But if we are saved by simply placing faith and trust in the Savior, doesn't it make sense why Paul would anticipate and answer the obvious objection of, "What then? Shall we continue to live in sin?"

And if the Churches of Christ are actually teaching the same gospel as the apostle Paul, shouldn't they be addressing the very same objection of why as believer we do not continue to live in sin?

Yet Church of Christ types are constantly having to defend themselves that they are *not* teaching a salvation theology of works!

Romans 3:8 is another question you will not hear of the Church of Christ: "And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? -as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say."

Here, Paul tells how the gospel message is deliberately mischaracterized as though it taught 'we can continue to live in sin' or 'live any way we want and still be saved' -as Baptists and other evangelicals are often accused of by the Churches of Christ.

Is this a mischaracterization that has ever happened to the Church of Christ? Conversely, did the apostle Paul ever have to defend himself by saying that he was NOT teaching a gospel theology of salvation by works as the Church of Christ constantly is?

If we are not saved by our own cooperation and obedience to all the necessary moral and religious requirements of God, but by simply placing our faith in Jesus Christ alone, 'What then, shall we continue to live in sin?' is an objection and concern that one could easily anticipate, especially if the message being taught is-

Salvation is by simply placing faith in JESUS CHRIST ALONE!

**So why even live holy?**

In regards to why the believer does not continue to live in sin, Bob L. Ross makes these comments from his book *Campbellism- It's History and Heresies*. Used by permission.

Campbellites say, "Well, if baptism and the church are not necessary for salvation, why be baptized and join the church?" This is typical language from merit-mongers who think only in terms of salvation by works. Those who speak in this manner have the attitude of "We will be saved by our works, or we just won't work at all.

Apparently those in the Churches of Christ know nothing about the love of God in the believer's heart which will motivate him to do those things that God Has commanded (Galatians 5:6). They think the only reason we should obey God is to keep Him from punishing us for disobedience.

If it were not for this reason, they themselves admit that they would not obey God. A Campbellite preacher once told me that if his salvation did not depend upon his works, then he would just yield to any temptation and sin against God.

That is why God despises the heresy of salvation by works: the "obedience" of such people is rotten at its heart; it arises from a selfish motive and not from a pure love of God. Read the scathing
denunciation by Christ of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and you will see how contemptible the heresy of salvation by works and those who believe it are in the sight of God.

The point is, God does righteousness because He is a righteous person. Jesus Christ does righteousness because He is a righteous person. God’s people hunger and thirst after righteousness because of the righteous nature they now have of God. Therefore believers serve God because they love Him for what He has done for them.

I’d be ashamed to have a religion that is followed only because I want something for myself. I’d be ashamed to have a faith that produced no more love in my soul for God than does the notion of salvation by works. Some people say, "Why, if I believed as you do- saved by grace and can't fall- I'd just take my fill of sin."

Such people reveal what they really love- sin. If they were righteous in their hearts, they wouldn't want to commit sin, regardless. The truth is they are committing heinous sin by sticking their filthy rags of self-righteousness in the face of God, rather than trusting in Jesus Christ for the perfect righteousness that could be theirs simply by placing faith in Him.

Chapter Two: A question about baptism and the “5 step plan of salvation”.


A myth that is often told by the Church of Christ to prove the importance of water baptism is that “in every case of conversion in the book of Acts, baptism is specifically mentioned.” (Spiritual Sword July 1970, page 16 & Jan. 1979, page 9)

Is this true?

Here are the instances where baptism is mentioned:


Here are the instances of conversions where baptism is NOT mentioned:


Notice, not one of the conversions recorded on Paul’s first missionary journey is baptism mentioned. Also, while some converts are not mentioned by name, other converts are, such as Sergius Paulus in Acts 13:7-12 and Dionysius and Damaris in Acts 17:34.

The truth is, you cannot find a single place in the entire New Testament where the "5 step plan of salvation" is listed without having to go from one example to another, from one chapter to another, or from one book to another.

This is interesting considering the fact that the New Testament is the product of 27 individual books and 8 different authors.

In other words, with so many different authors and books, wouldn't there be at least one place in the New Testament where everything a person must do to be saved would be listed if the Church of Christ gospel of "water" baptism for salvation were true?
What is the gospel?

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says, “I declare to you the gospel...which I preached...which you received...in which you stand...by which you are saved...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...that He was buried...that He rose again the third day... according to the scriptures.”

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came to earth, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised the third day.

That is the gospel message.

We are to go and tell people that God loved them so much, that He sent His Son to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and that He rose again.

What is our response?

What do we want people to do?

We want people to believe.

Continuing in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says (verse 11), “...This is what we preached, and this is what you believed.”

The bottom line is that people are to believe upon Jesus Christ, to trust in Him as their Savior. As Acts 16:31 says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

It is that simple.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.” Eph. 2:8

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” Rom. 1:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12

“Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears my Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life.” John 5:24

These are just a few verses, 154 places in the New Testament in all, where the Bible says those who place faith in Jesus Christ have eternal life.

Chapter Three: What is the purpose of the Old Testament Law?

One of the most common misconceptions in the Church of Christ is the purpose of the Old Testament Law. Here it is assumed that as God gave the Israelites the Old Testament so that the people could know what they had to do to go to heaven, God has thus given us the New Testament.
This view has led many in the Church of Christ to believe that God’s love and acceptance is directly proportional to our own moral and religious obedience to the requirements of the New Testament. And because of this, many believe that unless a person does everything just right, they cannot be loved and accepted by God.

However, the purpose and ministry of the Old Testament law wasn’t to save anyone, but to make our own sense of right and wrong more acute to make us understand how much we are in need of a Savior.

Jesus said that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. 5:20) And many people in the Churches of Christ have tried in vain to attain an "acceptable" level of righteousness.

But the Bible says that if we will place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, that the very righteousness of Christ Himself is given to us. That is why Romans 3:31 says that by faith 'we uphold the righteous requirements of the law,' for the righteousness of Jesus is credited or imputed to us.

The law was never intended to save anyone, but rather to magnify our sins to such a degree that we would despair of ever trying to save ourselves by keeping the Law. It’s real purpose was to cause us to say, 'God, if this is your standard of perfection, holiness and righteousness, -I can’t do it. Please forgive me and have mercy on me through Jesus Christ.'

In Roman society, children were often committed to the care of trusted slaves. This would happen when the child was between six or seven, and would last until puberty. These slaves and tutors were severe disciplinarians and were charged with guarding the children from the evils of society and giving them good moral training.

In the same way, Galatians 3:24 says that "the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be saved by faith."

So how does the Law point us to Christ?

By showing us our inability of keeping the law perfectly, we come to realize we must stop trusting in ourselves and our own moral and religious performance and to call upon God and place our faith in the Savior.

Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

As our substitute, Jesus lived holy for us so that the basis of going to heaven would be based on His perfect life and not our own (1 Cor. 1:30). Jesus also paid the penalty for our sin that we deserved so that God would not have to punish us (1 Peter 3:18).

It is God’s desire is to reconcile mankind to Himself, not to judge them...”not imputing their sins against them...” 2 Cor. 5:19. And a perfect, righteous and holy God seeks to take away our sin and anything that would separate us from Him.

God has done this through Jesus Christ and He offers us the perfect righteousness we need, not based on our own goodness, piety or moral or religious goodness, but to all who will place faith in Jesus Christ.

* * * *

"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be
given to those who believe...Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Galatians 3:21-24

Other References:

Romans 4:3, 5:17, 6:23, 10:3, 1 Cor. 3:9, 2 Cor. 5:19, Phil. 3:9, 1 John 1:9

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"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe...Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Galatians 3:21-24

Chapter Four: Does the Church of Christ reverse the order of faith and repentance?

The Church of Christ gospel “plan” is to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be “water” baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Here it is reasoned that if one will simply perform these “5 steps,” the believer will thereby save himself.

Notice that this plan places faith before repentance.

To those in the Churches of Christ, this is “common sense” because it is believed that ‘one must believe before he can repent.’ This view arises from their understanding of both “faith” and “repentance.”

“Faith” in the Churches of Christ is understood as nothing more than ‘intellectual assent” or accepting the facts of the Christian faith. To them it is believing God’s historical testimony about Himself, Jesus Christ, and that of the rest of the Bible.

Repentance on the other hand is understood as moral “self-reformation.”

In regards to faith, those in the Churches of Christ often fail to understand that there is a deeper, more substantive aspect of faith which is believing on Jesus Christ for eternal life, and most cannot distinguish between mere intellectual belief or assent from a personal faith that is trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Here, they will cite that “even the devils believe” (from James 2:19) in their sermons and will contend that even the "faith of devils" is the same as any other faith except that the faith of devils lacks any moral or religious good works.

Thus, their understanding gives rise to their reversal of the scriptural order of repentance and faith, and yet as we will find, there is not a single scripture in the New Testament to support their view.

To the contrary, when we consider this in light of Scripture, we find repentance actually preceding Faith:

“...you did not repent and believe him.” Matt. 21:32

“Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

“...repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 20:21
"...repent and turn to God." Acts 26:20

"...not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." Hebrews 6:1

These verses should make it clear that repentance actually precedes faith.

So why is this important?

This is significant because when Church of Christ members read passages like Acts 2:38 and "Repent and let each one of you be baptized," they assume that the passage teaches that if you want to be saved, what you must do is make the commitment not to sin anymore (i.e. repent or "self-reformation") and then get yourself baptized in water.

However, the word Repentance literally means "a change of mind."

The word for Repent is "metanoia" and it's actually two Greek words put together, "meta" meaning after, "noia" means mind or thought.

It literally means "an after-thought", "post-thought", or "a change of mind."

The word was used that if you said one thing, "I think I'm going to go do this..." and then changed your mind, "No, I'm not" –then you have repented.

In Acts chapter 2, Peter just has been telling them about Jesus, whom they thought was just a carpenter, or teacher from Nazareth. He says, "No, Jesus is Messiah, He is the God-Man who came doing the miracles, whom YOU put to death, Whom God raised up, He is both Lord and Christ..."

So when Peter says to "Repent," he was not merely talking about "self-reformation", but was telling the people to change their minds about Jesus Christ. They saw Him as a teacher or Rabbi from Nazareth. But Peter was saying, 'You have got to see Him as Lord, you've got to see Him as Messiah, you have got to repent (i.e. change your mind) about Jesus Christ.'

The bottom line is, this whole idea of repentance is that we see Jesus Christ as the Messiah, to trust Him as our Savior. And when you believe in Him there will be the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And BTW, everyone one of us who put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, changed our minds, we all repented.

Whatever else we were trusting in before we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we changed our minds about when we realized that Jesus Christ is the only way, that He is the Savior, and that He is the only One who will take us to heaven.

Chapter Five: You can know you are attending a traditional Church of Christ if they ...

1. Believe or assume that man is born basically 'good' or morally neutral, and does not have a prior inclination or predisposition to sin or to do evil.

Answer: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus Christ) the many will be made righteous." Romans 5:19

"...I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Romans 7:21-24

"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all." Romans 11:32
2. Believe that the unsaved, natural man can understand and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ without the inner working of the Holy Spirit.

Answer: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." John 6:44

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” 1 Cor. 2:14

3. Believe that if a person will simply try and apply themselves that we have the ability in our own strength to live every day without sinning.

Answer: "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9

“There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.” Ecc. 7:20

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Romans 3:10-12

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23

4. Believe that to be saved, all a person needs to do is cooperate and be obedient to all the necessary moral and religious requirements of the New Testament.

Answer: "And if by grace, then it (salvation) is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” Romans 11:6

“For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” Galatians 3:21

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Eph. 2:8-9

5. Believe that the definition of baptism (to dip, to plunge, or immerse) only means to be dipped, plunged, or immersed in the medium of water.

Answer: "He (Jesus) commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Acts 1:4-5

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” 1 Cor. 12:13

Author’s note: Water baptism is simply the believer’s outward sign or symbol of the true, actual, or Holy Spirit baptism that occurs at the moment of conversion.

6. Find it difficult to explain how that John the Baptist said he baptized with water, but there was One coming after him (that is, Jesus) who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Answer: "I (John) did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'” John 1:33

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 11:15-16
7. Stress the importance of being water baptized ‘for the forgiveness of sins,’ rather than by placing faith in Jesus Christ.

Answer: “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Acts 10:43

“...that they may receive the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Acts 26:18

“...(Jesus) whom God set forth as a propitiation (a satisfactory payment for sin) through faith in His blood.” Romans 3:25

8. Only know 8 verses from the book of Romans in chapter 6 and what they believe is being taught-water baptism for salvation.

Answer: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith.” Romans 1:16&17

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” Romans 3:21

"(God is) just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:26b

"But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." Romans 4:5

"(righteousness) shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead," Romans 4:24

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.” Romans 5:1-2

“... that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:9-10

9. Believe that faith alone teaches that a person can be saved by simply believing or accepting "as true" the facts of the Christian faith.

Answer: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:36“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” John 6:44

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.” John 11:26

Author’s note: Salvation by faith in Christ means that we are believing God’s promise that Jesus Christ saves us. Therefore it should be understood that there is a radical difference between BELIEVING THE FACTS of John 3:16 and BELIEVING GOD’S PROMISE in John 3:16.

10. Believe that salvation by faith alone is a watered down gospel taken out of context from a few passages of scriptures.

Author’s note: There are 154 passages in the New Testament that tell us salvation is by placing our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. It is systematically taught in the book of Romans (chapters 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 &11) and because of a doctrinal controversy, is also addressed in Galatians (chapters 2, 3, 4 & 5).
11. Accept the fact that Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again, but have a difficult time connecting “water baptism for salvation” with how the death of Christ was God’s satisfactory payment for YOUR sin.

Author’s note: Jesus Christ died on the cross receiving in His body ALL of God’s wrath, anger and righteous indignation for OUR sin. And because of God’s great love for us, God was willing to punish Jesus (our substitute) so He wouldn’t have to punish us. In other words, “water” baptism has nothing to do with the gospel and the believer’s salvation itself, but rather is simply the believer’s outward sign or symbol of his new relationship and identification with Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection.

Answer: “Then Peter said, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Question: If Christian baptism is only with water, why did Peter have to say “with water”? Why didn’t he just say, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized?”

"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:36-37

"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius….For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel." 1 Cor. 1:14-17

12. Try to attain righteousness and right standing with God through their own imperfect obedience to the commands and laws of God, yet at the same time have to admit they do NOT obey God’s moral or religious laws perfectly.

Answer: “What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.” Romans 9:30-31

“Since they (i.e. Israel) did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Romans 10:3-4

13. Are trying to be make themselves righteous by what they do, i.e. 'doing the right thing the right way for the right reason', and have never heard of the perfect righteousness that God provides as A GIFT to ALL AND UPON ALL who believe in Jesus Christ.

Answer: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22

“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” Phil. 3:9

14. Have as their salvation theme verse Acts 2:38 and their gospel message is, ‘repentance and water baptism for the forgiveness of sins.’

Answer: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” John 1:12

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” John 3:16-18

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” John 5:24
"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31

15. Believe methodology and procedural matters of the church, such as the use or non-use of instrumental music in worship, the correct church name (and how it is written), the observance of Christmas or Easter, the use of one cup or two, etc., are important issues because they are convinced we make themselves righteous by what we do rather than by trusting in Jesus Christ who makes people righteous.

Author’s note: The very righteousness we need, and don’t have in our own selves, God provides as a gift to all those who will place faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Answer: "...if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it (faith) was accounted to him for righteousness."" Romans 9:30

"For they (Israel) being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Romans 10:3,4

"...not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith." Phil. 3:9

16. Know someone who has re-water-baptized at least once because they felt they needed a 'do-over' and that 'this time' they'll really attain living for God.

Answer: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." Romans 7:18-19

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the (our) flesh (i.e. we are unable keep the law), God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh ...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us..." Romans 8:3&4

Author’s note: The good news of the gospel is that while we cannot hope to be “good” enough for heaven, that Jesus lived holy for us so that the basis of going to heaven is based on His perfect life and not our own.

17. Believe that the doctrine of salvation by faith alone teaches a person to continue to live in sin.

Answer: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue to live in sin that grace may abound? Romans 6:1

Question: If we are saved by the CHURCH OF CHRIST gospel of “hear-believe-repent-confess-be-water-baptized-(and-keep-ourselves-saved-by)-living-a-moral-and-religious-good-life”...

...why would the apostle Paul think it necessary to ask, "What then? Can we continue to live in sin?"

Any wrong religious or moral infraction could endanger that person's salvation.

But if we are saved simply by placing faith in Christ alone, rather than by our own moral and religious conduct, doesn't it make sense why Paul would anticipate this objection of why the believer, now that he is saved, should not continue to live in sin?

18. Mis-characterize those who believe in salvation by faith alone as though they teach a person to continue to live in sin.

Answer: "And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? –as we are slanderously reported and some affirm that we say." Romans 3:8
**Question:** If the Church of Christ is teaching the same gospel as Paul, how is it that they are never mis-characterized as though they teach, ‘we can continue to live in sin and still be saved’ –as Paul and others were in the New Testament?

19. **Believe that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a Calvinist doctrine.**

Author’s note: The doctrine of justification by faith alone is accepted/ predicated by both the Calvinist and “free-will” view.

20. **Believe that the Church of Christ is the only church which correctly teaches and follows the Bible, yet cannot explain how there can be other Christians in the world who do not believe and interpret the Word as they do.**

Answer: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.” 3 John 9-10

“Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.” But Jesus said, “Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.” Mark 9:38-40