

# The Oak Grove Oracle

(Family News & Views of the Oak Grove Church of Christ)

Meeting Weekly At Our Building Located At:

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## Erasing All Doubt (#3)

In the last two weeks, we have explored the Bible's teaching about the commendable desire to "make our calling and election sure," and to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12 and 2 Peter 1:10). Last Lord's Day, our *Oracle* article explored the logical question which often emerges in times of such introspection, "Can a person be taught wrong, or believe wrong, and yet be baptized right?"

When our article space was exhausted last week we were discussing valid Scriptural baptism (i.e. - doing what God said to do, in the Scriptural way God said to it, and with the right attitude, or for the right reason). For instance, someone might be immersed to get their spouse to quit "nagging" them to obey the Gospel. If they do it for that reason, and not because they really believe that salvation is only in humble obedience to Christ's instructions, then they just "got wet," not "saved," when they were "baptized."

Similarly, a person who knowingly and willfully does not repent of the sins of which he is cognizant at the time of his baptism has not been **Scripturally baptized**. That said, let me hasten to note that after more teaching and study, most converts, come to learn later on of ongoing sin in their lives, of which they were unaware at the time of their conversion. From my study of the Scriptures, it doesn't appear this invalidates their baptism, rather the Scriptures teach that at that point of conviction of sin, the Christian must be willing to "repent" of that sin, meaning "a change of mind that leads to a change of action" (i.e. - to stop participating in that which is sinful), and to seek God's forgiveness through confession and prayer (see the account of Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8:9-24, also read 1 John 1:5 - 2:2).

Finally, let us consider the question of what one must understand in order for their baptism "into Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27), to be valid and effective in providing for them the remission of all of their past sins (Acts 2:38). In other words, how much do you have to know for your immersion in water as a penitent, confessing, believer to be efficacious (effective, legal, adequate, productive) in claiming your salvation in Jesus Christ? If you were baptized in a denominational church, is that baptism valid in gaining your initial salvation in Christ?

Let's think about the matter logically and unemotionally. The truth is, the vast majority of denominations neither believe nor teach that baptism is a necessary part of the plan of salvation. I don't say that unkindly, it is just the truth. Read their literature and creeds, or talk with their informed leaders and you will quickly learn I have not misrepresented them. Though most denominations practice some sort of "baptism" as a ceremony of becoming affiliated with that church, they do not believe it is a necessary part of salvation. If they don't believe baptism is an essential element in availing forgiveness of man's sins, then it logically follows they do not teach their converts to be baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), or to "wash away sins" (Acts 22:16), or to "get into Christ and into His death" (Gal. 3:26-27, Rms. 6:1-4), and/or in order to "be saved" (1 Pet. 3:21).

If you were baptized as an "outward sign of an inward grace," as the largest Protestant denomination teaches, and often states at their baptisms, the implication being that Christ's grace has already been extended you prior to baptism, did you really understand that the saving grace of Christ's blood is not applied until you are baptized into His death (Rms. 6:3-4)? If you made the confession prior to baptism of, "I believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven me of my sins," which the largest denomination in America teaches and often requires its baptismal candidates to make, were you not then baptized for some other reason than the remission of sins? Remember the Bible teaches baptism is "for the remission of sins;" to "wash away sins;" to "get into Christ;" to get "into His death," where His blood was offered for our sins -- all of which convey the idea that salvation occurs only after we are baptized. That being the case, it is necessarily evident that a person understand that he or she is being baptized for the purpose of availing for themselves salvation through the grace and blood of Jesus, in order for that person's baptism to be Scriptural.

Again, it is not my place to judge what was in your heart when you were baptized. Only you and God know that! If you tell me you were **Scripturally baptized**, I'm going to take that at face value and accept you as a brother or sister in Christ. I have neither the time nor the inclination to be a detective and investigate your baptism to insure its validity. No preacher, elder, deacon, nor anyone else is charged to do that, nor would any of us be capable of that since we cannot read another's mind. However, if there is any reasonable doubt in your mind about the validity of your salvation, why not clear away the doubt and make sure of your salvation, by being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, as a penitent, confessing, believer, whose only desire is to comply with Christ's terms of pardon as stated in the Bible.

With eternity in view, and heaven or hell in the balance, why would anyone not want to "make their calling and election sure" when the opportunity presents itself? Surely such a critical matter as our salvation deserves our very best efforts at doing exactly what the Scriptures say we must do, in the way the Scriptures say to do it, and for the right Scriptural reasons. If Christ was willing to give His life for our salvation (Hebrews 9:12), dare we treat this matter casually, without making an informed, logical, and earnest response to all He says we must do to comply with His terms of pardon? Indeed, we should "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," for the Lord is patiently waiting to save all who will obey Him (Hebrews 5:9)!

**David A. McCain**