

A RESPONSE TO JAMES L. MELTON

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Mr. Melton, with the Bible Baptist Church in Sharon, Tennessee, is author of a tract entitled, "The Plain Truth about the Church of Christ," in which he has charged the churches of Christ with teaching heresy. These articles in Good News from Getwell are a response to his arrogant assertions.

The apostles of Jesus Christ taught that in advancing the soul saving gospel there are both many opportunities and many adversaries. In A.D. 56, the Corinthians received a letter from the apostle Paul in which he wrote, "For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (I Cor. 16:9). The application of this principle for Christians today calls for balance between declaring and defending the gospel. Balance demands that both be done (cf. Mark 16:15-16; Phil. 1:7, 17; I Pet. 3:15, 4:11). Throughout the New Testament the declaration and the defense of the gospel are seen to go hand-in-glove. For example, Peter wrote, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (I Pet. 3:13-15).

The gospel of Christ is misunderstood, maligned, and maimed by those cloaked as friends of Bible truth yet who speak with nothing but contempt for the churches of Christ. The inspired apostle Paul penned the words, "The churches of Christ salute you" in Romans 16:16. If denominational churches like the Baptist Churches are churches of Christ, then why do they not call themselves churches of Christ? Instead, many are as guilty as the malicious Jews by whose murderous hands Paul at Jerusalem was beaten (Acts 21:17-40). These people accused Paul of heresy for believing and teaching what the word of God says. In reference to these things Paul said before the council, "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:14).

An individual from Sharon, Tennessee named James L. Melton of the Bible Baptist Church authored a tract in 1998 that has been circulated under the misnomer of a

title, “The Plain Truth about the Church of Christ.” Although the tract consists of only six columns he charges the churches of Christ with heresy six times! One striking observation about his position is that the meaning of the word “heresy” is “contrary to the truth,” but Mr. Melton is a member of a church never once even named in the Bible! If he has anything to say from the Bible that will help churches of Christ follow Christ more closely say on, but if he intends to hold to the Baptist Church he needs to go to work on finding it in the Bible and proving that it even has a scriptural right to exist before launching an empty attack on the church about which the Bible speaks.

An Attack On The Church

Mr. Melton wrote, “Today the ‘Church of Christ’ teaches a number of heresies which every true Christian should avoid.” Mr. Melton began his attack by saying, “The so-called ‘Church of Christ’ did not appear on the pages of church history until the early 1800’s.” So, Mr. Melton leads the readers of his tract into a discussion about what he thinks is “The Plain Truth about the Church of Christ” with what is either a display of ignorance of the word of God in Romans 16:16 where the Bible says, “The churches of Christ salute you,” or a denial of that same revealed truth. Jesus Christ promised to build his church within the lifetime of the generation who lived during his personal ministry on earth (cf. Matt. 16:18-19, 28). The second chapter of the book of Acts details its establishment (Acts 2:38-47). How much of the New Testament would Mr. Melton have to deny before his readers catch on to the fact that he does not believe much of its teaching? The case is made, the point is proven that the first statement in Mr. Melton’s tract is false because the churches of Christ appear within the pages of inspiration in the first century not the nineteenth as Mr. Melton alleges (Rom. 16:16).

Perhaps Mr. Melton’s obvious prejudice against the churches of Christ blinds him to the simple truths of the Bible about the church. He wrote that members of the churches of Christ are “properly called ‘Campbellites’.” It could be that he has the same trouble correctly reading the dictionary that he does reading the Bible, for it says that the term “Campbellite” is “taken to be offensive” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 158). Is that his purpose sole purpose, just to be offensive? Informed people know that assigning unjustified, offensive labels for the purpose of misrepresenting serves only to deepen alienation and division.

The position he takes for the Baptists today is said to be to “reform the reformers.” The manner of reform the opening section of his tract takes is misrepresenting and maligning men like Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and Barton W.

Stone. What seems to upset Mr. Melton so is that these men were smitten by their consciences through independent study of the Bible about their involvement in and advancement of sinful division through party names and creeds in religion and were moved to cut away from the doctrines and denominations of men. A large movement of men and women away from denominationalism and into the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17:20-23 emerged in the nineteenth century. They re-discovered Bible truths about the church which as today are clouded by man-made churches and creeds. Unlike most religious people today, there were and are honest, sincere souls who believe in the all-sufficiency of the scriptures and deny the creeds of men many know, believe, and practice more than they do the word of God. A solid point of fact Mr. Melton and all those like him who try to use prejudice as a weapon need to face is that there is no teaching faithful members of the church believe that is true and biblical that originated with any of the prominent people of the restoration movement. It is a very weak line of reasoning for him to criticize someone for believing what the Bible clearly teaches because of whomever else may or may not have believed those same Bible truths.

A-Millennialism

Mr. Melton has stated, “A-Millennialism is heresy!” The criticism of churches of Christ he gave under this heading is reprinted in full.

A-Millennialism is the false belief that there will be NO Millennial reign of Christ and his saints. The Old Testament and the New Testament are filled with prophecies of a coming kingdom age when Jesus Christ will rule over the earth. For example, Consider Revelation 20:1-6. Read Revelation friend, and see for yourself that Jesus returns in chapter 19 and he rules for 1000 years in chapter 20. This is denied by the Church of Christ, in spite of the many Bible prophecies about the coming kingdom (Dan. 2:44-45; Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:6-7). A-Millennialism is heresy!

The inspired scriptures are all sufficient (II Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, the churches of Christ subscribe to no body of material or system of teaching outside of the sixty-six books of the Bible. Included in that assessment would be the peculiar teachings of J.N. Darby, C.I. Scofield, John Walvoord, and Hal Lindsey on premillennialism, i.e., the rapture, the seven-year tribulation, and the literal one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ on earth on the literal throne of king David in the rebuilt temple of Solomon after all the Jews have been miraculously gathered to Jerusalem. The churches of Christ are not in the majority on denying the fanciful scheme known as premillennialism, but the denial of it is more than warranted in

view of the scriptures. Premillennialism is guilty of “wresting” or “twisting” scripture, contorting it into a preconceived picture of pernicious pandemonium. The apostle Peter warned, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (II Pet. 3:15-16).

First, consider the “twisting” of the book of Revelation by the premillennialists. As everyone knows, the book of Revelation is filled with signs and symbols that convey its message in a way that exposes the demise of the enemies of Christ to Christians while protecting them from those same enemies. Jesus “sent and *signified* it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1; emphasis added). The scriptures are “twisted” by the premillennialist when he ignores or denies the context of a passage and creates a teaching the passage does not contain. Perhaps no better example of this irreverence is found than the text Mr. Melton abused. He wants a literal 1,000 years from Revelation 20, but he does not want anything else to be literal from that same text because if he did he knows the only ones who would supposedly reign on earth with Christ for a literal 1,000 years would be “the souls [not the bodies] of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God” (v. 4). Why should Mr. Melton expect to be a part of a literal 1,000 year reign--he has not been beheaded? Does he intend to make his readers think that he believes what the passage says? No, he will have to deny the text to get those who have not been beheaded into a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth.

Second, consider the “twisting” of the passages portraying the actual fulfillment of the verses Mr. Melton gave on the kingdom of Christ. His “twisting” of the subject follows two points. One, he limits the kingdom of Christ to only 1,000 years. Two, he holds that the kingdom of Christ has never yet been established but remains a future event.

The church of Christ is the kingdom of Christ (Matt. 16:18-19). The church of Christ began on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem in about AD 33 (Acts 2). Therefore, the kingdom of Christ is at this present point in the history of the world almost 2,000 years old and counting! The very verses Mr. Melton cited find their fulfillment in Acts 2 (Dan. 2:44-45; Isa. 2:1-4; 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33).

Mr. Melton will have to deny the passages in the New Testament that tell of the existence of the kingdom of Christ in the first century to remain consistent with his position. Verses constituting proof of this truth include Matthew 3:1-2 where the forerunner of Christ announced, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” If the kingdom of Christ is the church of Christ as just demonstrated from the Bible, then the kingdom was “at hand” having its beginning three and a half years later following the personal ministry of the Son of God. But, if the kingdom of Christ is still out there somewhere in the future at this point some 2,000 years after John’s announcement, then according to Mr. Melton John the Baptist had to be mistaken. The kingdom certainly could not have been “at hand” by any stretch of the imagination. John the Baptist was the only Baptist there ever was or ever will be that was right about what he taught, and Mr. Melton who claims to be a Baptist does not agree with him! In Mark 9:1 Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.” Mr. Melton if the kingdom of God did not come in the lifetime of those to whom Jesus spoke and the kingdom is yet to come, then there must be some very old people walking around somewhere. They would make Methuselah look like a baby!

In Matthew 26:29, Mark 14:25, and Luke 22:29-30, Jesus placed the Lord’s table and the Lord’s supper in his kingdom. Luke wrote, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.” Every time premillennialists like Mr. Melton say they partake of the Lord’s supper they either prove themselves hypocritical or ignorant of the Lord’s teaching on the placement of the Lord’s supper in his kingdom because they teach that the kingdom does not yet even exist! Mr. Melton you need to either stop trying to partake of the Lord’s supper or turn from your error on denying that the church is the kingdom.

A host of additional verses show the kingdom of Christ began in the first century. A partial list would include: John 3:3-5; Acts 2:22-36; 8:12; 14:22; 17:7; 20:35; 28:31; I Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:13; I Thess. 2:12; I Tim. 1:17; 6:15; Heb. 1:8; 12:28; Rev. 1:9. But, the verse that further exposes Mr. Melton’s “twisting” of the scriptures is one he did not cite, which is Acts 1:8. Notice in the verses he gave in talking about the coming kingdom that he gave Acts 1:6-7 which says, “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” In order to know why Mr. Melton stopped at verse seven just read on to verse 8. Mr. Melton did not want to give that verse because it proves that the kingdom would

come when the apostles received power from on high and through their preaching and teaching people would obey the gospel and be added to the church or kingdom of Christ. In the very next chapter in the book of Acts that is precisely what happened (Acts 2:38-47).

Baptismal Regeneration

Mr. Melton writes as a member of the so-called “Bible Baptist Church,” yet although he does admit, “Baptism is certainly important,” he emphasizes, “Over and over again God reminds us in His word that BELIEF on Christ is the main element in salvation, not baptism.” Why? Oh, Why? Then does Mr. Melton call the church with which he is affiliated the “Bible Baptist Church” instead of the “Bible Belief Church” since “over and over again God reminds us in His word that BELIEF on Christ is the main element in salvation, not baptism.” The criticism Mr. Melton and those who share his views make is not just a scathing, unfounded criticism of the churches of Christ for teaching what the Bible says on baptism but it is likewise a criticism of the Christ of the church because it was Jesus who said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Mr. Melton wrote regarding “Baptismal Regeneration,”

This is the false belief that a person receives the new birth upon being immersed in water. By carelessly charging through the Bible and mis-applying [sic] Scripture, the Church of Christ has damned thousands and thousands of people by giving them a false hope for salvation.

It is certainly true that a few verses of Scripture seem to teach this doctrine at first glance but it is also true that the rest of the Bible is true! We must believe ALL of God’s word, not just the favorite Campbellite texts. Over and over again, God reminds us in His word that BELIEF on Christ is the main element in salvation, not baptism (John 1:12; 3:15-18; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 11:25-26; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 4:5; 10:9-13; I Peter 2:6, etc.). The Campbellites like to ignore these simple verses, while confusing people with their favorite baptism texts.

What is it according to Mr. Melton that is costing “thousands and thousands of people” their souls? Hear him again, “The false belief that a person receives the new birth upon being immersed in water.” He then alleges that Christians whom he knowingly references objectionably as “Campbellites” are “carelessly charging through the Bible.” However, he seems to be charging toward his point so carelessly that he blew right by the texts on baptism. Why did he not give the

verses in John 3 that actually mention the new birth? Because an unbiased reader would see the falsehood of his statement disconnecting the new birth from water. So, to give the unbiased the opportunity to see what Jesus actually said, here is John 3:3-5, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Now that is what has Mr. Melton all inflamed against the churches of Christ; the very idea that texts of scripture mentioning water baptism should ever make it into print. Is water mentioned in connection with the new birth? The man does not believe the Son of God who answers in the negative.

Since Mr. Melton alleges that Christians charge right past certain passages of scripture, let's go ahead and point out from the list of scriptures he cited in his quotation that not only did he charge carelessly by the water of the new birth in John 3:3-5 but he also charged carelessly by verses 32-34 of Acts 16 which speak of the Philippians' obedience to the gospel by being baptized. The complete picture of occurrences there are “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” Perhaps he needed to sidestep that scripture because it is not said of the Philippian Jailor that he “believed in God with all his house” until after his baptism.

In Mr. Melton's references to belief in Romans he dodged chapter 6 where Paul wrote, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (vv. 3-6). Mr. Melton considers the presentation of verses like these “confusing people with their favorite baptism texts.”

Next, he went to I Peter 2:6 but cautiously avoided I Peter 3:20-21. An inspired apostle who devoted his life to presenting the will of God to a lost humanity is the one who wrote, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Apparently, Mr. Melton does not like to call attention to these verses because there is too much water mentioned in regard to the subject of baptism and salvation. Every verse in the Bible that mentions belief wholeheartedly is accepted and honored by Christians. Never will you find a Christian saying, “BAPTISM into Christ is the main element in salvation, not belief;” but that is precisely the position Mr. Melton has taken in regard to belief. He wrote, “BELIEF on Christ is the main element in salvation, not baptism.” It is Mr. Melton that advances favorite texts on belief to the exclusion of Bible baptism. He is wrong for criticizing members of the churches of Christ for teaching on the subject of baptism, for Christians stand with the Lord who said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” and hesitate not to teach on both belief and baptism. When Mr. Melton talks about someone carelessly charging through the Bible singling out favorite texts, for one I can say, “No, Mr. Melton it is not me but thee.”

The heading of “baptismal regeneration” is the lengthiest discussion in Mr. Melton’s concise tract. Two more paragraphs will be given verbatim and six separate items mentioned within them will be discussed.

One thing that the Church of Christ fails to teach about baptism is that Jesus Christ doesn’t baptize with water. In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist said, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” So the MAIN baptism in the New Testament is not a water baptism, but rather the Holy Ghost baptism. Notice I Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” Are we baptized into the body of Christ by WATER? No, we are baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit, just as John said in Matthew 3:11! The Church of Christ ignores this Spirit baptism by pretending that all baptisms are WATER baptisms. The baptism of Matthew 20:22-23 is not a water baptism, nor is the baptism of Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, or Romans 6:3-4. Acts 2:38 is another favorite Church of Christ text, and it has nothing to do with

you and I [sic] today. The Jews in Acts 2 received the Holy Ghost BEFORE they were baptized, proving that baptism isn't essential for salvation. By combining their water gospel with Acts 2:38, the Church of Christ has invented a very damnable heresy which strives [sic] on the ignorance of those who have never read verses like Revelation 1:5 or I Corinthians 1:17. ALL of God's word is true, not just the Campbellite "proof texts."

First, Mr. Melton said, "Jesus doesn't baptize with water." Perhaps a reminder of John 4:1-2 could help him correct that misimpression. The apostle John wrote, "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)." How many did John baptize? Matthew said, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:5-6). Clearly, a sizeable number of baptisms in water is represented in that observation, and the apostle John said that Jesus "made and baptized more disciples than John" the Baptist! If Mr. Melton wants to continue the impression that in Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist taught that Jesus would not baptize with water, then he must explain John 4:1-2.

Second, if Mr. Melton thinks Matthew 3:11 teaches that Jesus would baptize *everyone* with the Holy Ghost, then his position on that verse proves too much because the same verse says Jesus would baptize with the fire of coming judgment (cf. II Thess. 1:7-9). The two baptisms mentioned must be distinguished by considering further teaching by the Lord on just who would be baptized with the Holy Ghost and who would be baptized with fire otherwise the same ones who would be baptized with the Holy Ghost would later be baptized with the fire of judgment! Jesus is the administrator of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and the only people to whom that promise was made were the apostles (cf. John 14-16). The meaning of "for by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" is by the teaching which comes from the Holy Spirit are we all baptized into one body as readily is seen by reading about how the Corinthians were converted in Acts 18:8. Luke wrote, "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." They heard the inspired apostle Paul preach and were baptized following his instructions.

Mr. Melton later mentioned I Corinthians 1:17 apparently to imply that Paul taught against water baptism, but that point clearly is not made by Mr. Melton so he needs to come on out on it. The preceding verse shows that Paul baptized the household of Stephanas, so it will be hard for anyone to suggest that Paul taught against water

baptism when he himself actually baptized people in water. Mr. Melton has already sustained the point that if Paul did the baptizing, then it had to be water baptism because only Christ administered Holy Ghost baptism.

Third, Mr. Melton has argued that the baptism that put the Corinthians into the body of Christ was Holy Ghost baptism, but it could not have been because Paul administered baptism to at least the household of Stephanas (I Cor. 1:16) and only Christ administered Holy Ghost baptism (Matt. 3:11). Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Paul reported that is precisely what the Corinthians did, "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). Therefore, the baptism by which they were saved that put them into Christ and his body, the church, was the baptism of the great commission which is water baptism.

Fourth, Matthew 20:22-23 is the baptism of suffering. Mr. Melton would be hard pressed to ever find anyone associated with the churches of Christ who taught otherwise on the passage as he claims. His assertions that Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:12, and Romans 6:3-4 do not refer to water baptism do his case no good because he presented no argument or explanation on them. Just as I Corinthians 12:13 was demonstrated to be water baptism these verses can be too.

Fifth, Mr. Melton's statement that Acts 2:38 has nothing to do with people today truly is absurd. Jesus commissioned his disciples to "go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:19-20). The very first implementation of that command happened as recorded by inspiration in Acts 2 when Peter told the penitent multitude, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (v. 38). Who were the administrators of that baptism? Not Christ but the apostles. Mr. Melton needs to read Ephesians 4:5 which says there is "one baptism" and tell his readers if that "one baptism" today is water baptism or Holy Ghost baptism. He will have to answer why he practices some form of water baptism if he says the "one baptism" is Holy Ghost baptism. The proof that the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 is water baptism appears in I Peter 3:20-21 written after Paul made the affirmation that there is "one baptism." I Peter 3:20-21 says, "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh,

but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Sixth, Mr. Melton said that since Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized it proved that “baptism isn’t essential for salvation.” No, what that unique development proved was that the Gentiles were acceptable candidates for the gospel because that is the application Peter made of it before the apostles in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 11:1-18). Cornelius was to be told words whereby he could be saved (Acts 10:6, 22, 32-33; 11:14). The outpouring of the Holy Ghost consisted not in words but action. Peter commanded Cornelius to be baptized in water (Acts 10:33, 47-48). Far from “proving that baptism isn’t essential for salvation,” this example constitutes unassailable proof that baptism in water is essential for salvation.

Lastly, under this heading Mr. Melton concluded,

It is our duty to study and rightly divide all of the Bible, rather than believe everyone who manages to quote a verse out of context while ignoring a dozen verses that are twice as simple. Friend, don’t allow yourself to swept in [sic] by these false teachers. Baptism is certainly important, but it cannot save anyone. Jesus himself was baptized, but not to be saved (Mat. 3:14-15). Also the dying thief was NOT baptized, yet he went to be with Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:42-43).

The Bible certainly must be “rightly divided” or “handled aright” as II Timothy 2:15 affirms, and Mr. Melton raises a good point about the danger of quoting verses out of context. But, the point of his comment about “ignoring a dozen verses that are twice as simple” seems to have escaped him, and surely he could not intend to apply it to Bible teaching on baptism because verses which mention baptism certainly are not difficult to understand. For example, no difficulty is met in understanding the Lord’s statement in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

A correct and proper understanding of the English language would go a long way toward the resolution of doctrinal differences and promote unity among believers in Christ. The seeming frustration Mr. Melton expressed in what he said could be put to rest should he ever learn how the New Testament teaches obedience to the gospel of Christ. For instance, in language there is a figure of speech known as synecdoche where a part is put for the whole and the whole is put for a part. For example, hearing is put for the whole in I Timothy 4:16, belief is put for the whole in Acts 15:9, repentance is put for the whole in Acts 11:18, confession of Christ is put for the whole in I John 4:2, and baptism is put for the whole in I Peter 3:21. It

has been typical of Baptists across the years to select passages that mention the necessity of belief in Christ and then affirm that belief *only* saves the soul. The passages mentioning belief that use the figure of speech known as synecdoche where a part, i.e., belief, is put for the whole scheme of redemption deserve to be “handled aright.” Bible verses that use hearing the gospel or confessing Christ in synecdoche form are not teaching that hearing the gospel or confessing Christ are all a person must do to be saved any more than verses like I Peter 3:21 are teaching that baptism is all a person must do to be saved. Perhaps that is why Mr. Melton and Baptist preachers like him are put in the ridiculous position of criticizing Bible teaching on baptism and then turning right around and practicing some expression of baptism.

In Hebrews, the writer points to some who heard the gospel yet never developed faith. The Bible says, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:2). Again, in John 12:42-43 some of the Jews believed but would not confess Christ, “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” Should someone ever arise who taught that all a person had to do to be saved was to hear the gospel or all a person had to do to be saved was to confess Christ then that individual would be guilty of making the same mistake Mr. Melton makes by singling out belief to the criticism and exclusion of baptism. Mr. Melton is so far removed from an understanding of the English language and its use of the figure of speech known as synecdoche that he calls “everyone who manages to quote a verse” on baptism a false teacher. If that is not his position and he does understand the proper use of synecdoche, then let him give some examples of the use of synecdoche in the Bible. When he does we will bring him right back to the subject at hand and make the application.

As noted earlier, Mr. Melton said, “Baptism is certainly important, but it cannot save anyone.” Well, since he admits baptism “is certainly important,” then why all the chiding and accusations of heresy levied against the churches of Christ for teaching on the subject? What Mr. Melton may discover if he reads his Bible without prejudice is the truth that Jesus Christ commenced, continued, and concluded his personal ministry teaching about baptism (cf. Matt. 3:13-17; John 4:1-2; Matt. 28:18-20). A concern is that in Mr. Melton’s apparent disdain for and desire to omit the subject he leaves behind a mutilated gospel (Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19). Some sort of prejudice or mental blocking out of what the Bible says must be at work for someone to say as does Mr. Melton and every Baptist preacher of note that baptism “cannot save anyone.” Observe, please, that Mr. Melton did not say that baptism *alone* cannot save anyone. He affirmed that baptism “cannot

save anyone.” When the multitude guilty of having crucified the Son of God inquired of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter certainly led them to believe baptism saved because he responded, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:37-38). Years later he would write, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 3:20-21). The Bible says, “Baptism doth also now save us;” Mr. Melton of the Baptist Church says, “Baptism cannot save anyone.” He would do just as well to argue with Jesus and the apostles about the place and purpose of baptism as to argue with members of the churches of Christ about it because we stand with Christ and the apostles.

Mr. Melton observes that Jesus was baptized but not to be saved. Congratulations for discovering that Jesus was baptized as the exception that makes the rule standard. He said to John, “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). “Suffer it,” means “allow it” (*aphes*, aorist imperfect of *aphiemi*, “allow or let”). John was baptizing people “for the remission of sins,” so when Jesus requested baptism “John forbad him” knowing Jesus to be the sinless Lamb of God (John 1:29; Matt. 3:14; Mark 1:4). The Son of God set the example on being baptized and could not have fulfilled all righteousness without it, and sadly Mr. Melton calls members of the churches of Christ heretics for teaching others to do what Jesus did. Shame, shame.

In the light of Matthew 3:5-6 where the gospel account reveals, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins,” how can Mr. Melton unequivocally state that “the dying thief was NOT baptized”? Additionally, John the Baptist was preaching, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and the dying thief requested, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Matt. 3:1-2; Luke 23:42). Mr. Melton’s position forces him to take the view that the thief had no knowledge of John the Baptist’s preaching and practice of baptizing multitudes, so how did the thief know about the kingdom of Christ? It is true that he may have learned about it from the disciples of Jesus, but that will do no good in affirming that the thief definitely was not baptized because “Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)” (John 4:1-2). The point Mr. Melton and those who advance this Baptist doctrine need to realize is that no man living today can be saved like the thief for two reasons. One, on earth Jesus had power to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6). Jesus is in heaven, so no man living today can be saved like the thief; Jesus is not

physically present to speak your sins forgiven. Two, the thief did not have to believe that God raised Jesus up from the dead and all men living today must believe that in order to be saved. Paul said, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

No Sin Nature

Beneath this heading Mr. Melton wrote,

The Church of Christ also teaches that men are not born with a sin nature, but rather BECOME sinners later in life. Such a suggestion is almost funny to anyone who has taken time to read their [sic] Bible (Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Romans 3:10; 3:23; 5:12).

Men are BORN sinners with a sin nature, which is why Jesus said we must be born again (John 3:3).

Here a Baptist meets one of his greatest challenges, that is, attempting to explain how babies who, according to Mr. Melton, are sinners and are not lost. Baptists do not baptize babies. Unable to speak, babies cannot confess Christ. Since Mr. Melton made absolutely no attempt to explain his position, perhaps a question is in order. Would Mr. Melton agree with Wayne Allen, "Pastor" of the Briarwood Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee, who said years ago on a television program airing over WREC channel 3 in Memphis on a program called "What Is Your Faith?" that babies are lost sinners, but if they died they would go to heaven. Generally, these men teach salvation by faith alone, but when it comes to babies whom they consider sinners they compromise even on that point and say these lost sinners will go to heaven! At what point in their growth and development would these sinners no longer be granted a place in heaven? This one false teaching of the Baptist people ought to empty out all their cathedrals of confusion.

Assume the Baptist position on babies being sinners to be true and look at what Jesus did in Matthew 18:3 and 19:14, "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven . . . But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Mr. Melton is saying that Jesus took a sinner, albeit a little sinner, and set him up as picturing what the kingdom of heaven is like! Moreover, Mr. Melton has the Lord pointing to a sinner and saying unless people become like him they cannot enter into heaven! Is that exposure enough for this ridiculous false doctrine that holds the position innocent infants are lost?

Mr. Melton brought it up, so he ought to suffer the embarrassment of having his evasion exposed. Notice how he spoke about this fallacy. He spoke of “men” being born sinners with a “sin nature.” Why did he not say “babies”? Can he not bring himself to explain to crushed parents who have lost a precious infant to death that their child was born a “sinner with a sin nature”? Let’s see if Mr. Melton can get people to think of something like that as being “funny.”

Mr. Melton referenced several passages of scripture but gave no argument based upon them. The Bible nowhere supports his false doctrine, and here is why. Psalm 51:5 affirms that the world into which David was conceived and carried in his mother’s womb was laden with iniquity, not that David himself was a sinner. (The Calvinists who worked on the older editions of the NIV on this verse are as mistaken as Mr. Melton. Bear in mind that those who recommend the NIV place themselves in league with false teachers like Mr. Melton). Psalm 58:3 says, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” If Mr. Melton really wants to see something “funny” let him show his readers a newborn baby that is “speaking” as soon as it is born. Now it becomes easier to see why he would list the reference without giving either the passage itself or any attempt to explain it.

In Romans 3:10, 23, Paul is talking about those who should have benefited from reading the oracles of God but did not (3:2), therefore, the context insists that he has people of maturity capable of reading in mind and not babies. Romans 5:12 says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” For this verse to teach the position Mr. Melton holds it would of necessity have to read, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all *babies, for that all have sinned.*” Does the verse read that way? No! The verse does not even say *sin* passed on men or babies; it says, “*Death* passed upon all men.” Let Mr. Melton attempt an argument from these verses. When and if he does, it will appear even more foolish than imagined in this discussion.

It was not necessary to call attention to the verses Mr. Melton referenced because he made no attempt to present an argument based on them, but in the interest of truth it is beneficial to expose error.

In closing this section, please, notice what the prophet Ezekiel said on the subject, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him”

(Ezek. 18:20). The Bible is teaching in this verse “men are not born with a sin nature.”

Lord’s Supper Required Weekly

An insightful criticism of churches of Christ by Mr. Melton suggests a fundamental error on his part in understanding how the Bible teaches. Presented are his remarks in their entirety on this topic.

The Church of Christ teaches that the Lord’s Supper is supposed to be observed on a weekly basis, but the Bible never says this once. There is certainly nothing wrong with a church observing the Lord’s Supper on a weekly basis, but no one has a right to command it. The Bible never says how often this is to be done. If you’ll read Matthew 26:26-28 and I Corinthians 11:23-26, you will see what God’s word says about this subject, and you will notice that God does not command a weekly observance. Anyone who does command a weekly observance is ADDING to God’s word.

Two areas of concern emerge from Mr. Melton’s remarks. First, the position he holds is that the New Testament does not teach a weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper; he says, “The Bible never says this once.” Now notice the contradiction in his teaching when he immediately follows that statement with another which allows what he affirms the New Testament does not even teach—not even once! He said, “There is certainly nothing wrong with a church observing the Lord’s Supper on a weekly basis. . . .” If the New Testament does not teach something, not even once, how can a person in good conscience do the thing under consideration, which is not taught?

A side note on this which is closer to home—for several weeks over 56 AM on “The Truth In Love” radio broadcast this fallacy was exposed on the part of Bellevue Baptist preacher Adrian Rodgers who had written in the *Commercial Appeal* a defense of dancing in worship as an acceptable form of religious expression. Members from Bellevue responded in defense of Mr. Rodgers who agreed that dancing in worship was not acceptable to God. The respondents took the problem Mr. Melton has in understanding the Bible a step further; they believed something to be acceptable to God that not only does the New Testament not even teach but that it specifically condemns (Gal. 5:19-21). The problem observed points to a lack of respect for and dependence upon the written word of God as the complete and final revelation from God to man (cf. II Tim. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19).

Now, is Mr. Melton correct in his assessment that regarding the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper "the Bible never says this once"? Bear in mind that in wording his affirmation as he has Mr. Melton has obligated his position to go down in defeat provided a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper can be shown from the New Testament "once." Attention is invited to the book of Acts chapter 20 at verse 7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." The "breaking of bread" is a reference to the observance of the Lord's Supper because it contextually is linked to the worship of the church as Paul on that occasion was preaching to the assembled disciples. What was the day of the week? "The first day of the week" or Sunday. So, the Bible authorizes the observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, and since every week has a first day, then the Bible teaches a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper.

In the event that Mr. Melton should disagree with understanding the use of "upon the first day of the week" this way, then, in the interest of being honest and consistent, his usage of that phrase will be considered in another weekly worship practice. The collection of the saints is also a weekly practice for the same reason and exactly the same wording (in English and in Greek) as is the Lord's Supper. The apostle Paul wrote, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Cor. 16:1-2). All it took for Mr. Melton to be convinced that giving should take place weekly was one passage of scripture, and he is ready to pass the collection plate! Here is an example of people taking a passage and practice that suits them and doing it while another passage containing an identical element presenting a divine duty is disregarded.

Mr. Melton said, "Anyone who does command a weekly observance is ADDING to God's word." When it comes to giving, he has fallen on his own sword.

The second area of concern from Mr. Melton's criticism of churches of Christ is his fundamental error on understanding how the Bible teaches in general. More that is deserving of attention needs to be presented on this subject than space will allow, but knowing the position of the apostles of Christ in the church today should prove helpful. The apostle Matthew wrote, "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). A reference to the church as the

spiritual Israel of God is meant (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:16), and the authority of the apostles of Christ to guide and supervise the practices of the church today is an area in which they continue to exercise judgment. The first century Christians understood this because Luke informed his readers, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth, and they were so guided (John 16:13; II Pet. 1:3; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19). The inspired practices they exemplified serve subsequent generations of followers of Jesus Christ in confidently knowing how to present themselves acceptable to God (I Cor. 11:1; I Thess. 2:11-13). Their authorized observance of the Lord’s Supper certainly is no exception.

Mr. Melton, with the Bible Baptist Church in Sharon, Tennessee, is author of a tract entitled, “The Plain Truth about the Church of Christ,” in which he has charged the churches of Christ with teaching heresy. This article in Good News from Getwell concludes the review of the material in Mr. Melton’s objectionable tract.

Musical Instruments Forbidden in Worship

The final subject of Mr. Melton’s choosing in attacking the churches of Christ is represented under this heading. His complete comments on the subject are:

Of the various heresies taught by the Church of Christ, this may be the most foolish. The Bible is filled with musical instruments (Psa. 33:2-4; I Chron. 25:5-6; II Sam. 6:5; I Chron. 16:42; Neh. 12:27; Psa. 150), and there are even musical instruments in Heaven (Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2)! To forbid instruments in worship is simply another case of ADDING to God’s word. Two favorite texts for this heresy are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which speak of Christian music coming from the heart. Neither verse forbids instruments, and neither verse speaks of a worship service. Both verses are dealing with an individual believer’s personal fellowship with Christ, not church worship services!

Evidently, a point all Baptists have in common is disregard for the three dispensations or ages of Bible history. Why would people today be in error for offering a ram in sacrifice to God like faithful Abraham? (Gen. 22). Abraham was a man of God, yet he was not a Christian, not a member of the church. Can people say today, “I want to be like the biblical character Abraham. I want to be saved without ever being a Christian or a member of the church”? Billy Graham has been on record for more than two decades affirming the salvation of the Jews outside of

Christ because he will not acknowledge the fundamental nature of Bible history that it presents God's dealings with man through three great dispensations or time periods. Why was Saul's kingdom taken from him when he offered an animal sacrifice? (I Sam. 13:9-14). Abraham did it, and he was called "the friend of God;" Saul did it, and Samuel told him, "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God."

Saul's error cannot be fully and properly understood while disregarding the absolute biblical fact that Abraham and Saul lived under different laws or covenants. For example, Abraham was never taught by God to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The Sabbath day observance was a unique feature of the law of Moses and not revealed nor required from God until Moses received the commandment for its observance at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 20:8). Nehemiah spoke of the precise time that God made Sabbath day observance binding, "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant" (Neh. 9:13-14).

Maybe Mr. Melton would like to try his hand at answering this response for the curious or possibly even concerned Baptists who may read it and wonder why people living today do not offer animal sacrifices or observe the Sabbath (seventh) day as holy. Should he bring into the discussion the difference Christ made by his death on the cross, we will welcome the discussion and be standing by with Colossians 2:14 for all to see and consider. Paul wrote, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14). Romans 1-3 shows that before Christ came the Gentiles and the Jews lived under different laws and will be judged accordingly, but people living since the first century will be judged by the gospel of Christ (Rom. 2:16; John 12:48-49). Mr. Melton errs in refusing to handle "aright the word of God" (II Tim. 2:15, ASV), and it may be correctly observed of him and his fellow Baptists as Jesus observed of the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).

Mr. Melton compliments himself for finding instruments in every age except his own. If the Lord allowed and authorized its use in the church today, then provide the passage. Mr. Melton may wish to reword his charge against the Lord's church when he wrote, "Two favorite texts for this heresy are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16" because the Bible does not teach heresy! Clearly, he seems perturbed that these verses authorize singing but place the use of instrumental music in a vacuum. In criticizing members of the churches of Christ for their respect for these verses, he is just whistling as he walks by the cemetery because

he seems afraid to properly exegete them. Surprisingly, he claims that these verses do not even authorize singing in the worship of the church! Do Baptists sing in their attempt to worship God? Do they believe they may sing in worship in the absence of a verse authorizing the practice? Mr. Melton emphatically asserts that these verses deal exclusively with “an individual believer’s personal fellowship with Christ, not church worship services!” His position robs him and his people of New Testament authorization to sing in worship. Will they or have they already ceased the practice in their services? Mr. Melton definitely is in a quandary. He cannot find Bible for the instrument he uses in worship, yet he has Bible for singing in worship but rejects it!

When Mr. Melton argues for authorization of instrumental music in worship today from the Old Testament he places himself under the curse to perform all of the law because Paul wrote, “ For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Gal. 3:10). “All things which are written in the book of the law” would include dancing (Mr. Melton made special reference to this when he drew the reader’s attention to Psalm 150), animal sacrifices, returning thrice annually to Jerusalem for worship, Levitical priesthood, and much more. When Mr. Melton argues for instrumental music in worship today by referring to heaven in the book of Revelation he places himself in the position of using harps in worship today. Does he do this on a regular basis? If he is arguing that Revelation mandates the practice, then why does he not do what he says the Bible teaches on the subject and have harpers harping on their harps in worship today? He saw harps in Revelation 5:8 and suggested their presence in heaven authorizes their use in worship today, but he overlooked the golden bowls of incense in the very same passage. Do they burn incense in worship at Sharon, Tennessee where Mr. Melton is? How can they exclude that practice when Mr. Melton is teaching them that since it is in heaven it is authorized in the church? Bear in mind that not everything in heaven is allowed in the church. It is a false assumption to believe so because Paul said he knew a man that “was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (II Cor. 12:4). This man heard something in heaven he was not authorized to speak on earth, therefore, not everything in heaven is allowed in the church. Mr. Melton’s reasoning on this point, too, is fatally flawed.

Finally, he says forbidding instrumental music in worship is sinful and constitutes adding to God’s word. He will not and cannot consistently stand by that proposition. His position is that since the Bible does not specifically condemn its use, then it may be done today and beyond that if the Bible does not specifically prohibit a practice, then to teach against it is adding to the Bible. Well Mr. Melton, where does the Bible specifically prohibit the burning of incense in worship? He

has suggested burning incense is called for from Revelation 5:8. Where does the Bible specifically prohibit infant baptism, sprinkling for immersion, counting beads in worship, dancing in worship, putting butter on the bread at the Lord's table, appointing a pope or a cardinal? Doubtless, Mr. Melton does not do these things, but since he prohibits them his argument makes him guilty of adding to the word of God. Can you see the flaw in his reasoning? The apostles taught that to go beyond "that which is written" is to "transgress" and those who do "have not God" (I Cor. 4:6; II John 9-11).

Thank you, for reading this response "in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (Phil. 1:7, 17; Jude 3).