

Titus 3:5

“washing of regeneration”

(Baptism, regeneration, and conversion)

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Introduction

Historically, the Church has used the word “regeneration” in two different ways: (1) as referring to baptism and the incorporation into the Church, and (2) as conversion. The former use is the dominant one in the early church, and the latter one the dominant use in evangelicalism today and since the Reformation. The problem is that Scripture teaches both ideas, using language that includes both (“regeneration” and “born again”), so what terms do we use? The 1928 Book of Common Prayer speaks of regeneration in baptism, but also uses potential language in that baptismal office, indicating that there is something more that may follow. The New Testament speaks of “regeneration” in baptism (Titus 3:5) and also of being “born again” in John’s writings as conversion. How do we present these things without confusing people? This paper is not an exhaustive study of these ideas, but primarily a study of “regeneration” in Titus 3:5 (with some other passages) and of “being born again” in John. The point is to demonstrate that both ideas of regeneration are in the New Testament, and that we in the Reformed Episcopal Church can hold to the Declaration of Principles and believe in “regeneration” in baptism without denying the other aspect of “new birth/conversion.”

Grammatical Analysis

In Titus, we have Paul giving Titus instructions about the qualifications of “elders/bishop.”² Furthermore, in chapter two he gives instructions for older men and women, younger men, bondservants, etc. Then in chapter three, Paul reminds Titus that we all at one time were outside Christ (v. 3), but contrasts that with the grace of God now given to “us.” Verses 4-7 of chapter three give us one sentence about God’s grace in salvation. This is a somewhat involved verse that breaks down nicely by its various dependent clauses, all centered around one independent clause with its main verb. (The clauses are indented to help imply the various modifications and dependencies.)

- (1) We have a dependent temporal clause explaining the *time* salvation was manifested (v. 4)
- (2) A second dependent clause giving the *basis* of salvation (v. 5a)
- (3) independent clause stating the *main point* (v. 5b)
- (4) an involved clause stating the *means* of salvation (v. 5c)
- (5) a relative clause explaining *whom* was poured out and why (v. 6)
- (6) a clause giving the *purpose/result*³ of this salvation (v. 7).

Follow the Greek interlinear and the above 6 clauses I have produced:

¹ Permission to use this is given if and only if there are no changes to its content, it is used only for an individual, and it is not used in any way for financial profit.

² This is not the place to debate whether there is a deliberate distinction between “elders” and “bishop” since Paul uses the plural for the former and the singular for the latter. There are many good studies on this. Most consider that in this particular context, Paul is using one for the other. But note that Titus is to “appoint” these men, making Titus in some sense over them.

³ In this case “purpose” and “result” are not distinguishable, which is not uncommon.

TIME (v.4) (1) ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ,
When the kindness and love appeared of savior of our God,

BASIS (v. 5a) (2) οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ
Not⁴ by works which in righteousness

ὧν⁵ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς
which we did ourselves

ἀλλὰ
but

κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος
according to his mercy

MAIN POINT (v. 5b):

(3) ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς
he saved us

MEANS (5c) (4) διὰ
Through λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας
washing of regeneration

καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου,
and renewing (or renewal) of the Holy Spirit,

RELATIVE (WHOM Poured OUT) (v. 6)

(5) οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως
Whom he poured on us richly

διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν,
thru Jesus Christ savior our.

PURPOSE (v. 7) (6) ἵνα
In order that

δικαιωθέντες τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι
having been justified by his grace

κληρονόμοι γεννηθῶμεν⁶
Heirs we should become

κατὰ ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου.
According to the hope of life eternal.

⁴ We have what the basis is not: our works, and what it is: His mercy. These are mutually exclusive.

⁵ Critical text has δ, but here it makes no difference.

⁶ This verb goes with the ἵνα. The other verb (“being justified”) is an aorist passive participle, nominative, plural, masculine, that modifies the verb “we should become.” The basis for being “heirs” is “according to the hope of eternal life.” Faith, hope, and love all go together in Paul, emphasizing God’s gracious free gift to us.

That is a typical Pauline sentence! Notice that salvation comes down from God to man, that man receives salvation as a gift from God, contributing nothing to his own salvation. At the *proper time*, God manifested His love for mankind by sending the savior, which implies that man could not save himself. The *basis* for man's salvation is stated negatively, not man's works, and positively, God's mercy. The *main point* is that God saved us. The stated *means* of our salvation is noted by the preposition (διὰ), "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." The *agency* of the Holy Spirit is further explained as the One whom Jesus poured out on us. The *goal* of salvation is that we would become heirs to eternal life. This Pauline summary of our salvation is not meant to be a complete treatment of salvation, something Paul does quite well in Romans, but an overview that gives the essence of salvation. Let us look at the summary in more detail before we analyze the means of salvation in detail.

TIME (v.4) Some connect οτε ("when") with τότε ("formerly") in verse 3, meaning something like "formerly . . . now," but when οτε begins a sentence, as it does here, we should understand it as simply introducing its own dependent, temporal clause: "when." This would seem to be very similar to Galatians 4:4-5: "But *when* (οτε) the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." The grammatical point is that οτε ("when") introduces a temporal dependent clause here in Titus 3:4. The theological point is that God is the One who initiated salvation, who sent His Son to man. Thus, in contrast to all non-Christian religions, we have God seeking man, not man seeking God (cf. Rom. 3:11).

BASIS (v. 5a) Not only is man's righteousness excluded but God's mercy is made the sole basis for man's salvation. There is a strong contrast between "what we did ourselves" and "His mercy," between "we" and "His," so that man's so-called righteousness is totally excluded as the reason he has a saving relationship with God.

MAIN POINT (v. 5b) The whole sentence is structured around this verb ("He saved"), which is aorist indicative active, 3rd person singular. This is the main independent finite verb in this long sentence. The other finite verb is ἐποιήσαμεν (v. 5a, meaning "we did"), which is aorist indicative active, 1st person plural, but it is in a parenthetical clause, and thus not the main verb.

MEANS (5c) It is noteworthy that "faith" is conspicuous by its absence in the means of salvation in this passage, though Paul certainly emphasizes its necessity in many other passages (Rom. 4:1ff; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). Here Paul is anxious to exclude man from his own salvation in any way.

RELATIVE (v. 6) This relative clause explains that the Holy Spirit is given freely (in connection with v. 5a) and that He came through Jesus Christ. This

seems to be a conceptual parallel to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 where Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the Church, which parallel is strengthened in that the same Greek word for “poured out” is used in Acts 2:33 as here. In fact, Acts 2:33 states, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *He poured out* this which you now see and hear.” The Day of Pentecost was for the corporate Church as well as for individuals, and here in Titus 3 we have by implication and connection with Acts that the Spirit is for the corporate Church. Furthermore, since Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on “us,” and since Paul uses the first person plural throughout this long sentence, the implication is that the salvation here is for the Church corporate. Furthermore, other points of salvation in this sentence are corporate: the savior appeared (implication is for the Church), He saved *us*, the Spirit poured out, and we should become *heirs*. Other points are individual: not by works which we did, and being justified. But the “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” as we shall see, is also for the *individual* who is incorporated into the *Church* so that both corporate and individual aspects are here.

PURPOSE (v. 7) The main point of the purpose clause is revealed by the verb that normally follows a *hina* clause, a subjunctive, in this case “that *we should become heirs*.” The parenthetical clause, “having been justified by His grace,” refers to the past. It is debated as to its grammatical connection in this sentence. The aorist participle (“justified”) can be prior to the main verb (“that, *having been justified*, we might become heirs”), or it can be coincident in time with the main verb (“that we might be justified and become heirs”). By the analogy of Scripture, being an heir is often spoken of as a present possession (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29; 4:1, 7, 30; Eph. 3:6) while being justified is a past event in the life of a believer (Rom. 5:1, 9; 8:30, etc). From the placement of the aorist participle (“justified”) so far from the main verb (“should become”) and from the analogy of Scripture just mentioned, it seems that we should understand the participle as prior to the main verb: “that, *having been justified*, we might become heirs.” (The participle is not likely attendant circumstance since these occur in narratives and are usually just prior to the main verb.⁷)

⁷ Matthew 28:19 contains a classic participle of attendant circumstance, as instanced by virtually all the grammars. As every Greek grammar states, participles do not have mood. Thus the participle here in Matthew 28:19 receives its mood from the main verb and is translated like the main verb but with “and” after it: “*Go and* make disciples . . .”. I know of no English version that translates this in other way than an imperative. Furthermore, the participle is not passive voice in meaning and cannot be translated “having gone.” This is a deponent verb, which means the *form* is passive but the *function* is active. This same form of “go” as attendant participle is common in Matthew (see 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 21:6; 22:15; 27:66; and slightly altered form in 17:27; 18:12).

Interpretative Considerations

Justified

In the broader context, “justified” has one of several conceptual connections:⁸ coincident with the gift of the Spirit or baptism; the presupposition for receiving the Spirit; the intended result of receiving the Spirit. Even better is the idea that “justified” is coincident with “He saved” and is a further definition of “saved.” Thus Paul would be saying in effect: “He saved us, in order that,⁹ having been justified, we should become heirs.” Thus “justified” further defines “saved.” Furthermore, since “justified” further defines “saved,” and since the means of salvation are declared to be “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” justification also is conceptually connected to this key expression. The idea would be that one is “saved” and “justified” by the means given, which would place justification at the point of “the washing of regeneration.” This would be a formal justification, a justification at the point of being incorporated into the Church, if this key expression includes the idea of baptism (and we shall argue that it does).

Paul also places “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” as seemingly occurring at the same point in our salvation in 1 Corinthians 6:11: “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

“Washed”

The word for “washed” here in 1 Corinthians 6:11 (ἀπελούσασθε from ἀπολούω) is only used here and in Acts 22:16: “Arise and be baptized, and *wash away* your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” It is obvious that “wash” is associated with baptism in Acts 22:16, and thus by implication in 1 Corinthians 6:11 just quoted above. The Greek verb for “wash” is middle voice in form, but some scholars think that this is a case where the middle is used for the passive as most English translations render it passive.¹⁰ But A. T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures*, Dunn in *Baptism*, p. 123, and Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p. 163 disagree, arguing that the form should be understood as a middle, as it undoubtedly is in Acts 22:16. The emphasis here in 1 Corinthians 6:11, according to them, would be the voluntary submission in baptism. This makes more sense to me. The idea would be that they allowed themselves to be washed, implying submission in bap-

⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, ICC series, 1999), p. 323.

⁹ ἵνα would be connected with “He saved.”

¹⁰ See Gordon Fee, NICNT on 1 Corinthians, p. 245, footnote 31. There is a great danger in doing exegesis just by Greek forms. We often hear preachers say “*literally* this means,” and then they explain the form of the Greek. The form is only the first step, for the *function* may not be at all what the form is. One must use good tools, if he does not Greek real well, to find out what the function is. For example, the present tense may not mean continuous action, the aorist tense rarely means once for all, some verbs take their direct objects not in the accusative but in the dative or genitive cases, some Greek verbs must mean continuous action regardless of tense, and so on.

tism. This indirect middle is best rendered in English with a passive in this context with the other two verbs that are without doubt passive in both form and idea (“sanctified” and “justified”). This gives us a connection to Titus 3:5 and its “washing.” Both Titus 3 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 have “washed” and “justified.”

Moreover, according to the Louw-Nida lexicon,¹¹ “wash” is semantically related to the various forms of the Greek words for “holy,” “sprinkle,” “pure,” “spotless,” and “blameless.” They especially list “wash” with “to purify” (᾿αὐνίζω), which in a related form is used in 1 Corinthians 6:11 (᾿αὐτάζω). This lexicon is arranged according to Greek words that are related to one another semantically (conceptually) and is considered by New Testament scholars to be a great achievement. It is not arranged by root as sometimes words can be quite different from one another even though they share the same root. Moisés Silva states of this lexicon: “The most significant publication in Biblical Greek lexicography—indeed, in the whole area of biblical semantics—during the past decade is undoubtedly [this] two-volume work. . . . To the best of my knowledge, this is the first complete dictionary (in any language and for any corpus of texts) that uses the inherent semantic structure of a language rather than the formal category of alphabetization as the basis for describing lexical meaning.”¹²

The point to all this is that baptism is associated with the work of the Spirit and with “washing” in 1 Corinthians 6:11, which would lend credence to the same idea in Titus 3:5. Notice also that justification here in 1 Corinthians, as in Titus 3, is also connected to the Holy Spirit.

“Through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”

Now that we have placed this key expression in its context, we must try to learn what it means. Our first observation is that the one preposition (διὰ) controls two ideas (“washing of regeneration” and (καί) “renewing of the Holy Spirit”) connected by “and” (καί). The pertinent question is what the significance of this one preposition and two ideas may be. Grammarians often see a connection between two ideas when connected by one preposition and joined with “and” (καί).¹³ One example is: “Not repeating the preposition may indicate that the author considered both objects as an undivided unit. Thus the water and the Spirit in John 3:5 . . . (‘except one is born *by* water and Spirit’) should be thought of as a unit, rather

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 88:24-88:35.

¹² Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983, 1994), pp. 188-89.

¹³ A. T. Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 566; Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3, p. 275. Turner counts 24 times in the Pastorals where there was an opportunity to repeat the preposition with a connected idea and only 4 times is it repeated.

than as two separate steps in the regenerative process.”¹⁴ There are other places in Paul where the one preposition “through” (διὰ with the genitive) connects two ideas with “and” (καί) that are related (prepositional phrase underlined):

“through smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18).

“Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1).

“praying always through all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18).

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit” (Col. 2:8).

“And not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God: (Col. 2:19).

Some, however, have understood the preposition to do double duty, rendering the verse: “*through* the washing of regeneration and *through* the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” But this has not met with much favor with grammarians or exegetes. If we consider the one preposition as controlling two ideas, as putting the two thoughts under one roof, we must ask what the connection may be between the “washing of regeneration” and “renewing of the Holy Spirit” here in Titus 3:5. This can only be settled by understanding the meaning of the particular words in the prepositional phrase, but here are the main possibilities before we consider the meaning of the words:

(1) There is “a long tradition, stretching back to Theodoret, [that] interprets the clause as a virtual chiasmus: He saved us ‘by a regeneration effected through the water and the renewal effected through the Holy Spirit.’ By this means a distinction is drawn between the crisis of the new birth bestowed by baptism and the continual renewing of life by the Spirit—a view not inimical to the practice of confirmation.”¹⁵ Here we would have this construction:

through	the washing of regeneration
	and
	renewal of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴ Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*, p. 87. We will see later that John 3:5 is conceptually parallel to Titus 3:5.

¹⁵ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 210.

Second, the standard Greek lexicon renders *loutron* as “bath, washing of baptism” and regarding Titus 3:5 the rendering is “the bath that brings about regeneration.”¹⁹ Another lexical argument that is very significant is from the Louw-Nida lexicon in which *loutron* is connected semantically with all the Greek words for baptism (βαπτίζω, βάπτισμα, βαπτισμός, βαπτιστής).²⁰ The same lexicon also states concerning *loutron*: “Ceremonial washing referring to baptism—‘washing, baptism.’” Regarding Titus 3:5, the authors state: “In Titus 3:5 *loutron* has generally been regarded as referring to baptism.”²¹ Concerning the other occurrence of *loutron* in Ephesians 5:26, they state: “In Eph. 5:26 the phrase ‘washing of water’ has been generally interpreted as a reference to baptism. . . .”²²

Third, Spicq says of *loutron* in Ephesians 5:26: “This purifying effect of bathing is highlighted . . . ‘purification carried out by means of and in the form of a bath with water,’—qualified by ‘with the word,’ a reference to the sacramental formula. This is a reference to baptism, which washes away sins (*apolouesthai*, Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6.11) and whitens the soul (*leukain*, Rev. 7:14).”²³ Regarding Titus 3:5 he comments: “The rite of *loutron* symbolizes this transformation. Having been begotten by the bath, one comes out from it strong and well. Hence Titus 3:5—‘He saved us, according to his mercy, by a bath of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.’ St. Ambrose comments accurately: ‘The father has begotten you by the washing.’”²⁴

Fourth, Lampe gives patristic evidence that *loutron* was connected with baptism. He states that it was equivalent to the rite of baptism in a treatise by Melito; that Chrysostom connects it with baptism, and by Justin in his *Apology*.²⁵ It is seen as a “cleansing,” as “conferring remission of sins,” as “regeneration,” as “union with Christ in death and resurrection,” as “resurrection and immortality,” as “replacing circumcision,” and many other things.²⁶

We must also consider the word “regeneration” (παλιγγενεσία) in Titus 3:5 which is used only twice in the New Testament, here and Matthew 19:28 (for similar thought see Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1). In the Matthew passage, it is clear that the idea of “rebirth, regeneration” in the sense of the eschatological “renewing of the world in the time of Messiah.”²⁷ Kittel says: “The Jewish faith in the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of the world

¹⁹ BAGD, p. 480, (obviously from the abbreviation it is the 2nd edition).

²⁰ Louw-Nida, 53.41-53.43.

²¹ *ibid.*, 53.43.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2:412.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 2:414.

²⁵ Edited by G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 812.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 812-13.

²⁷ BAGD, p. 606.

is clothed in this term.”²⁸ The term was used prior to the New Testament in everyday language to refer to any kind of rebirth or regeneration, such as life after death or the renewal of the world after the conflagration.²⁹ Kittel further states: “In Jewish literature [regeneration] is found from the time of Philo. . . Philo uses [regeneration] of the restoration to life of individuals . . . and also of the reconstitution of the world after the flood. . . .”³⁰ But in our literature, both the New Testament and the early fathers, “the concept of the new birth is already associated with baptism and conversion.”³¹

Kittel’s interpretation of “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” in Titus 3:5 is to the point: “Here [regeneration] is the result of baptism and parallel to [renewing]. It does not mean only attainment to a new life with the end of the old life, nor does it mean only moral renewal; *it embraces both*.”³²

We may draw some conclusions about the first part of the phrase (“washing of regeneration”), that the “washing” is undoubtedly baptism, as understood by the fathers and most modern scholars.³³ The construction “of regeneration” could be a genitive of possession (“washing belonging to regeneration”), genitive of quality (“regenerating bath”), or objective genitive (“baptism that effects regeneration”). From the meaning given in the sources above, it seems to be the last category. Furthermore, if baptism results in regeneration and baptism is a legal ceremony, it would seem to confirm the legal idea of regeneration in this context. Baptism would legally place one into the covenant. A conceptual illustration would be Colossians 1:13: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Baptism takes us out of the covenant of death and places us into the covenant of life, the “place” of rebirth (Gal. 3:27).

“Renewing”

The word “renewing” (ἀνακαινώσις) means “renewal, of a person’s spiritual rebirth . . . ‘be changed by the renewal of your minds,’ Rom. 12:2.”³⁴ It is also semantically connected with other Greek words for “renew”:³⁵

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man *who is renewed* in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Col. 3:9-10).

²⁸ TDNT, 1:688.

²⁹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 319.

³⁰ TDNT, 1:687-688.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 320. Marshall notes that the term does not come from γεννάω (which is the word used in John and 1 John) but is associated with γίνομαι and γένεσις.

³² TDNT, 1:688, emphasis added.

³³ I would say that 9 of 10 modern scholars agree that its baptism.

³⁴ BDAG, 3rd and newest edition, p. 65.

³⁵ Louw-Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 58.70-58.75.

and *be renewed* in the spirit of your mind (Eph. 4:23).

From these passages, we see that “renewing” has an ongoing sense. The idea in the verb itself suggest such (“renewing”, action in process), the present tense argues for it, and the context in each case is describing a process. Yet Mounce argues for a “once-for-all renewal because salvation is seen as an accomplished fact.”³⁶ He refers this to positional sanctification, a thoroughly evangelical concept but one that can lead to antinomianism if one does not see position as *necessarily* effecting one’s practice. Mounce seems to contradict himself a few lines later when he concedes that Colossians 3:10, a parallel to Titus 3:5, is a continuing renewal: “and have put on the new man *who is [being] renewed* in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”³⁷ The counter to his argument is the passages just referenced (Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:23) where “renewal” is continual. Moreover, it is typical Pauline to “mix tenses” of salvation, as it were. We modern Christians have divided salvation so much that we cannot conceive that in one sentence an apostle can speak of many aspects of salvation. The apostles do not always neatly divide salvation into justification, sanctification, and glorification, but often mix them. We can divide them in concept but not separate them from one another in fact as if salvation were a sliced pie so that one can have one slice but not the other slices. (“I’ll take justification, thank you, but not sanctification.”)

Kittel’s comment on Romans 12:2 is to the point:

... [renewing] refers to the renewal of thought and will which Christians constantly need if they are to show by their moral conduct that they belong to the new aeon [“age”] and are members of the new humanity. The subject of this inward renewal, which affects the center of personal life, is the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:13) who dwells and works in the Christian. The saying in Titus 3:5 refers to the unique and basic beginning which the Spirit makes in man at baptism. Without any human cooperation there arises in baptism the [new creation] (2 Cor. 5:17) by the miracle of renewal through the Holy Spirit, who created a life that was not there before.³⁸

If the “renewing” is continual and if the Holy Spirit does it, we would have a subjective genitive in the expression “renewing *of* the Holy spirit, with the resultant meaning being “renewing *by* the Holy Spirit.” Moreover, we must relate it to the context here in Titus 3:5. It is under the *one* preposition (διὰ), connecting it with baptism. Yet it has a meaning of its own. The connection would seem to be

³⁶ William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 449ff. Mounce is a very able Greek scholar, whose grammar we use at the seminary, but his baptistic, evangelical presuppositions are blaring at this point.

³⁷ I’m sure there is an explanation for this seeming blunder as Mounce is too competent a scholar for such an error within a few lines.

³⁸ TDNT, 3:453.

that baptism regenerates; that is, places one in the covenant, gives one standing with God, and receives covenantal life. The “renewing” begins with baptism, as baptism is mentioned first but “renewing” closely follows. Furthermore, we know from the analogy of Scripture that baptism places us in Christ (Gal. 3:27), and that this is the beginning, not the end, of God’s work in us. Most denominations agree that baptism is to be done only once and is initiatory. Baptism is a legal ceremony that covenantally places one in Christ. But there is more. We also have connected with baptism (through the one preposition $\delta\iota\alpha$) in this verse the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in us, which reflects our organic, living union with God.

Thus we have argued that position one, mentioned earlier, is correct:

through the washing of regeneration
and
renewal of the Holy Spirit.

As J. N. D. Kelly rightly states of this view:

[This view] preserves the balance of the sentence better; and the fact that Pauline, and early Christian thought generally, connect the Spirit closely with baptism is decisive in its favor. . . . On this interpretation the effect of baptism is first defined in terms of regeneration or rebirth. . . . In this way early Christianity interpreted baptism in light of current eschatological ideas about the restoration of the world in the coming age, now believed to have dawned. This thought is elaborated in Paul’s further description of baptism as renewal. By this he means the complete transformation, or elevation to a new order of being, which the Christian undergoes in baptism.³⁹

If one has the “washing,” the *assumption* is that he has the “renewing.” Without the former, one does not have the latter. From Hebrews 6:4-6, which is a conceptual parallel to Titus 3:5, we know that some can be “enlightened,” “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” and yet fall away. But these were just as much in the covenant as anyone else, which is why apostasy is so real and heinous. Likewise Hebrews 10:26-39 has the same idea of those in the covenant who fell away, who had been “sanctified” by the blood of Christ but “had insulted the Spirit of grace.” Here, once again, we have the combination of legal or formal elements (“sanctified”) followed by the working of the Spirit in the covenant. But the assumption is that everyone in the covenant has been regenerated in the Titus 3:5 sense and is also being renewed

Whether one can lose the “renewing” is not the topic of Titus 3:5, but seems to be answered “yes” in the Hebrews passages mentioned in the above paragraph.

³⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 252.

Lest some misunderstand, the number of the elect cannot increase or decrease, but we do not know who they are. Only God does. The elect reveal themselves to *us* by their perseverance. That is not addressed in Titus 3:5.

Objections

Of course, the difficulty some people have with this “sacramental” view is that baptism itself cannot accomplish such. But we are not saying that the water itself does this but that God does it through the water or sacrament. Furthermore, to conclude as one man “that a spiritual economy cannot be tied to a material agency as an indispensable channel of grace”⁴⁰ is implicitly to deny the incarnation. Jesus was God incarnate, God with a body, if you understand me rightly, and the greatest good was spiritually accomplished with His physical body as the God-man died on the Cross for our sins and raised Himself from the dead. Here physical and spiritual were united, without which we would perish.

Furthermore, to reject the sacraments as accomplishing spiritual good by the power of God’s Spirit is to fall into the heresy of Gnosticism, separating the physical from the spiritual. Anglicanism avoids the extremes without disconnecting the physical and the spiritual. One extreme is that the water in itself accomplishes conversion/regeneration (*ex opere operato*, which is a Roman view, meaning automatically, with or without faith). There is no room for faith in this view. The other extreme is that baptism does not matter (baptistic). In fact, so this view maintains, baptism belongs to the individual, and if he “decides” his first baptism was not valid, he/she can have it done again. In other words, the keeper of the covenant is not the Lord Christ but the individual. It is the individual who decides whether the baptism is valid or not, not Christ. Yet, Christ is the one who officiates in baptism (as also in the Lord’s Supper), and He means it every time. To baptize again, therefore, is an insult to Him who is the dispenser of His grace.

Anglicanism, in keeping with the fathers and good exegesis, maintains that the sacraments, by God’s Spirit, are channels of grace that actually accomplish spiritual good through faith. (What keeps the Anglican view from being *ex opere operato* is that the sacraments work through faith, not in and of themselves.) In Titus 3:5, the baptism effects regeneration, not conversion *necessarily* (though in God’s good pleasure it could be). Also what begins at baptism is the Spirit’s renewing work, a covenantal work that reveals an organic connection with Christ (see John 15:1ff). All in the covenant have this work, but only the elect have it to the end, and only God knows who they are.

The *individual* aspect of what Paul is saying in Titus 3:5 is seen along with the *corporate*. One at a time we are baptized into Christ, but the result is that we are made members of His corporate Church. Paul is saying that we have been

⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p. 209. He is quoting someone else.

saved, justified, with a view to being heirs and having eternal life. Eternal life is not an abstract gift that one receives individually apart from union with Christ in His visible Church, but Paul is making the point that we have salvation, justification, eternal life, etc through the means of grace of the “washing of regeneration.” And this means of grace grants us entrance into the corporate Church, into the Church visible and invisible. And once in this Church, we also have as a result the “renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Here we stand individually **and** corporately, legally (once for all “washing of regeneration”) and organically (continual “renewing of the Holy Spirit”). One either has both or neither. The conclusion is that we are not saved absolutely alone but through incorporation into Him, and we are not saved legally (baptism, formal justification) without the organic (renewing of the Holy Spirit, personal sanctification).

Conceptual parallels

John 3:5

Once again, in John 3:5 we have two ideas following a single preposition and connected by “and”: “born *of* water **and** the Spirit,” resulting in three ideas to consider: (1) water, (2) Spirit, (3) and the connection between “water” and “Spirit.”

“Water”

(1) Regarding “water,” the early fathers were virtually unanimous that this was baptism, and once again most modern commentaries agree.⁴¹ The “water” in John 3 cannot be one’s first, physical birth because John uses “born again” and “born of water and the Spirit” as synonymous. Both “water” and “Spirit” are part of the *second* birth, which means that “water” cannot be the water of the first birth (when a woman breaks her water). If John were referring to the woman’s water in natural birth, this would be the only such reference in the whole Bible. Furthermore, Nicodemus should have made the Old Testament connection between water, cleansing, and forgiveness of sins. The Old Testament basis for John 3:5 is Ezekiel 36:25-29:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of 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 keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will deliver you from all your

⁴¹ Even D. A. Carson, who opposes the idea of baptism here, states that “‘water’ is understood by the majority of contemporary commentators to refer to Christian baptism. . . .” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 1991, p. 192.

uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you.

And Keil and Delitzsch state of Ezekiel 36:25-29

The figurative expression, “to sprinkle with clean water,” is taken from the lustrations [sic] prescribed by the law, more particularly the purifying from defilement from the dead by sprinkling with the water prepared from the ashes of a red heifer (Num. 19:17-19; compare Ps. 51:9). Cleansing from sins, which corresponds to justification, and is not to be confounded with sanctification, is followed by renewal with the Holy Spirit, which takes away the old heart of stone and puts within a new heart of flesh, so that the man can fulfill the commandments of God, and walk in newness of life (vv. 26-28; see also 11:18-20).⁴²

In this Old Testament passage, we have both the legal (“will sprinkle clean water,” “will cleanse you . . .”) and the moral/conversion aspect (“I will give you a new heart, etc”), or as Westcott states it, “the external rite” and the “internal operation.”⁴³ There are other Old Testament passages that connect ceremonial cleansing, the covenant, and the “internal operation” of the Spirit (Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3; 52:15; Ez. 11:19-20, etc).

Even in Genesis one, we have the Spirit of God hovering over water and creating a new world, so here we have the same Spirit creating new hearts in connection with water or baptism. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter connects the Old Testament outpouring of the Spirit of Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:16-21) with his baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Like Ezekiel and the Old Testament commentators who interpret Ezekiel, Peter assumes that the one who has baptism also has forgiveness of sins. And indeed, in the formal sense one does. But then according to 1 Corinthians 10:1-10, Hebrews 6:4-6, and 10:26-39, it is possible to become a covenant breaker and lose the covenant privileges, including forgiveness of sins and the working of the Spirit of God in one’s life. But it is my conclusion that if one is truly “born again/converted” that he will repent, that he is elect and cannot finally fall away (see 1 John 3:9 below). But at times of apostasy, one does not know even his own status, which is why David prayed for God not to take His Spirit from him. Apostasy is not hypothetical but a real possibility (see Heb. 10:39).

“Spirit”

(2) Regarding the “Spirit” in John 3:5, there is little doubt that He is the Holy Spirit, but what is His work here? We see that He enables one to enter the king-

⁴² Keil and Delitzsch, *Old Testament Commentaries*, on Ez. 36:22-28.

⁴³ B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1881, p. 49; see also E. W. Hengstenberg, *Ezekiel* and E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 1865, vol. 1, p. 160ff.

dom and is sovereign in His work. (See v. 8 where, like the effect of hearing the wind but not seeing it, one “sees” the effect of His sovereign work in the new birth.) Earlier in John 1:12-13, we see that those who believe (v. 12, the evidence is faith) had been born of the Spirit (v. 13, the cause is the “born of God”). In 1 John, John connects the new birth with the Spirit of God without ever mentioning “water.”⁴⁴ There he is emphasizing the “Spirit” or “born again/conversion,” that grace that leads to perseverance, which perseverance is the evidence of—not the cause of—one’s “born again/ conversion” and demonstrates that one belongs to God, not to the devil (1 John 3:9, 10, “1 John” see below). Both here and in 1 John the word for “born” when used of “born again/conversion” is always used in the passive voice, meaning that the “born again/conversion” was not something the person did but was done to him/her. This is true of baptism; that is, one does not baptize himself/herself but one has baptism done to himself/herself.

“Water and Spirit”

(3) The connection of “water” to the “Spirit” is surely one of unity since, like Titus 3:5, we have one preposition connecting both nouns. As D. A. Carson states, “The most natural way of taking this construction is to see the phrase as a conceptual unity: there is a water-spirit source.”⁴⁵ The terms of “water” and Spirit” could be explanatory, subordinated, or coordinated.

Calvin takes the “explanation” view, that we have a hendiadys, meaning “born of water, *even* the Spirit,” making the “Spirit” the explanation of what “water” means. Many have followed him, but the evidence from the fathers and from what we have given above argue against this view.

The Roman Church tends to take “Spirit” as subordinated to “water,” meaning that the working of the Spirit is necessarily given once the water is applied. Here we have “born again/conversion” that can be lost.

Westcott and many others, myself included, based on the analogy of Scripture (Titus 3:5; 1 John [see below]; 1 Peter [see below], and the Old Testament passages cited above) interpret the expression as coordinated but joined. That means that the rite of water baptism *infers* the inward working of the Spirit. In other words, the rite and the meaning of the rite infer one another, and they are normally joined in Scripture so that one is assumed to have both if he has either. The rite is normally required for salvation though the sacrament and the inward reality are not so joined that one cannot have one without the other. In other words, on the one hand, it is possible for one to be regenerated in the sacramental sense, placed in Christ covenantally, have the grace of Hebrews 6 and 10, but then apostatize, fall away. (See Simon in Acts 8:13, 20-24 for the classic example of

⁴⁴ The one exception is 1 John 5:6-8 where water is connected with blood and the Spirit.

⁴⁵ Carson, *John*, p. 194. Carson takes “spirit” here to be God’s nature as spirit, which is surely a most novel and strained position to take.

one baptized but without the Spirit's working.)⁴⁶ On the other hand, it is possible to "born again/conversion" without the rite in extreme cases such as those in Acts 10:47, though these were baptized shortly after receiving the Spirit, which means they are not ultimately separated.

The parallels with Titus 3:5 are clear: one preposition governs two ideas: "of water and Spirit." "Water" refers to baptism, and the Spirit to His work, just as in Titus 3:5 "washing" refers to baptism and the Spirit is mentioned later in the phrase.

Furthermore, the baptism of water and of the Spirit are connected to Christ after His resurrection. The baptism "in" (or "with" or "by") the Spirit is only mentioned 7 times in the New Testament and always connected with water baptism and after the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; 1 Cor. 12:13; see also Acts 2:38). Moreover, baptism and the Spirit are also connected to one another as Westcott rightly states:

... after the resurrection the baptism of water was no longer separated from, but united with, the baptism of the Spirit in the "laver of regeneration" (Titus 3:5; see Eph. 5:26), even as the outward and the inward are united generally in a religion which is sacramental and not only typical. Christian baptism, the outward act of faith welcoming the promise of God, is incorporation into the Body of Christ, and so the birth of the Spirit is potentially united with the birth of water. The general inseparability of these two is indicated by the form of the expression, *born of water and Spirit*, as distinguished from the double phrase, *born of water and of Spirit*.⁴⁷

The conclusion to John 3:5 is that baptism and the Spirit infer one another, being joined sacramentally, and that this is an almost exact parallel to Titus 3:5. The one difference, as we shall see below, is that in John the working of the Spirit entails "born again/conversion."

1 John

Perseverance is addressed in the "new birth" in 1 John, which is a different Greek word from "regeneration" in Titus 3:5 with a different idea.⁴⁸ Here John tells us clearly that the new birth he has in mind is persevering grace: "The one who is born of God does not [practice]⁴⁹ sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot

⁴⁶ The early fathers constantly quote this Simon as an example of apostasy.

⁴⁷ Westcott, p. 50.

⁴⁸ As we have seen, often different Greek words have the same or similar ideas.

⁴⁹ I have spent over a quarter century researching this verse, and it still seems to me that Calvin has the best exposition of it in his commentary, which is the gift of persevering grace. Furthermore, the use of the present tense with some verbs in John still seems to me the best answer to the seeming contrast between those who commit an act of sin (1 John 2:1-2, aorist tense) and these here in 3:9 who cannot practice sin (present tense with certain verbs, and this is one of those verbs). The distinction is between those who are covenant keepers with an ongoing repentance, (continued on bottom of next page)

[practice] sin, because he has been born of God” (3:9; see also 2:28; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 for similar ideas). Notice that in this passage “water” or “baptism” is not mentioned, but the same word John uses in John 3:5 for “born” is used here. There is little doubt that there is a connection between 1 John and John 3:5, but the emphasis in 1 John is on “born again/conversion.” In 1 John we see the *effect* of this new birth by the relationship of the perfect tense to the present tense each time “birth” is used in a verse:

Perfect passive tense (cause)	present tense (effect)
(2:29) Has been born of Him	practices righteousness
(3:9) Has been born of God	does not [practice] sin
(4:7) Has been born of God	knows God and loves people
(5:1) Has been born of God	believes Jesus is Messiah
(5:4) whatever has been born of God	overcomes the world
(5:18) whoever has been born of God	does not [practice] sin

He who has been born of God (perfect tense) has the continued efficacy of its present effect⁵⁰ (present tense) so that the child of God cannot lose this “born again/conversion.” It seems clear that the one who has this birth has conversion, for his life is now one of obedience to and love for God. Just consider 1 John 2:3-4 as also indicating conversion: “By this we know that we have come to know⁵¹

who sin and confess it (2:1-2), and those who give themselves over to sin, practicing it, leading to apostasy. These agree with me: John Calvin; Colin G. Kruse, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters of John*, 2000, pp. 120, 124; A. T. Robertson, the great Greek grammarian, *Word Pictures*, p. 223; see also Robertson massive grammar, pp. 890, 1081; Zerwick, *Biblical Greek*: “. . . in 3:9 he says that he who is born of God is not able (present: be habitually a sinner) because he is born of God, i.e. cannot continue the sinful life that was his before his regeneration” (p. 82, Zerwick refers 2:1 to an act of sin since it is aorist tense); Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*: on 2:1 with 3:9 he says that 2:1 is an “act of sin” based on the aorist of “to sin” and 3:9 is the “state of sinning” based on the present tense, so that 3:9 says that “sin will not have dominion over him” (pp. 150-51); Westminster Theological Journal, Fall, 1977, pp. 136ff, of which one good quote is: “The thought being conveyed is 1 John 3:9 is not that one born of God will never commit a sinful act but that he will not persist in sin” (p. 142); B. F. Westcott in his commentary on 1 John: “[John] describes a character, a prevailing habit, and not primarily an act” (p. 104). For contrary explanations, see I. Howard Marshall, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistles of John*, 1978, p. 178ff; Stephen S. Smalley, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1, 2, 3 John*, 1984, p. 158ff. St. Augustine makes it a particular sin Christians cannot commit—typically—against love.

⁵⁰ B. F. Westcott in his commentary on 1 John 3:9, p. 107. The advanced Greek grammar, Blass-DeBrunner, reminds us that the perfect tense “combines in itself, so to speak, the present and the aorist in that it denotes the continuance of completed action” (#340). Wallace further reminds us that “It is incorrect to say that the perfect signifies abiding results; such conclusions belong to the realm of theology, not grammar” (*The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, 2000, p. 246-7). Though the perfect in itself does not state abiding result, in these verses it does with the combination of the present tense, it seems to me.

⁵¹ The force of the perfect tense here seems to be on completed action, “come to know,” though it makes good sense also to emphasize the result, just “know.” Like most Greek forms, the perfect form does not always function with the idea of completed results but can often be translated as an English present tense.

Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”⁵² “It is this divine birth which is the explanation of the moral character of a child of God.”⁵³ Here we have the principle “like Father like son.” Just as in the natural realm a son will resemble his human father, so in the spiritual realm those born of God will look like Him in character, and Satan’s seed look like him. Moreover, since the perfect tense emphasizes the completed result in each case in 1 John where “born” is used, the present tense in the same verse in each case states explicitly what that present result is: practicing righteousness, not practicing sin, loving, believing in Jesus, overcoming the world (respectively from each verse). Thus, he cannot fall away (3:9) but will practice righteousness unto the end (2:29; 5:18). This is “born again/conversion,” and the aspect that most evangelicals think of when they say “regeneration.” Calvin’s summary of 3:9 is still the best I have seen:

And he cannot sin. Here the Apostle ascends higher, for he plainly declares that the hearts of the godly are so effectually governed by the Spirit of God, that through an inflexible disposition they follow his guidance. This is far removed from the doctrine of the Papists. The Sorbons, it is true, confess that the will of man, unless assisted by God’s Spirit, cannot desire what is right; but they imagine such a motion of the Spirit as leaves to us the free choice of good and evil. Hence they draw forth merits, because we willingly obey the influence of the Spirit, which it is in our power to resist. In short, they desire the grace of the Spirit to be only this, that we are thereby enabled to choose right if we will. John speaks here far otherwise; for he not only shows that we cannot sin, but also that the power of the Spirit is so effectual, that it necessarily retains us in continual obedience to righteousness. Nor is this the only passage of Scripture that teaches us that the will is so formed that it cannot be otherwise than right. For God testifies that he gives a new heart to his children, and promises to do this, that they may walk in his commandments. Besides, John not only shows how efficaciously God works once in man, but plainly declares that the Spirit continues his grace in us to the last, so that *inflexible perseverance is added to newness of life*. Let us not, then, imagine with the Sophists that it is some neutral movement, which leaves men free either to follow or to reject; but let us know that our own hearts are so ruled by God’s Spirit, that they constantly cleave to righteousness.

[skipping two paragraphs] But here a question arises, Whether the fear and love of God can be extinguished in any one who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God? for that cannot be, seems to be the import of the Apos-

⁵² I. Howard Marshall agrees with this assessment: *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles of John*, 1978, p. 183.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 186.

tle's words. They who think otherwise refer to the example of David, who for a time labored under such a beastly stupor, that not a spark of grace appeared in him. Moreover, in the fifth-first Psalm, he prays for the restoration of the Spirit. It hence follows that he was deprived of him.⁵⁴

By "regeneration" Calvin means "born again/conversion." He goes on to explain that David still had God's life in him and eventually came around to repentance and restoration. Thus we have in 1 John a balanced picture of the "born again/conversion" being unstoppable grace (3:9) but the realism that we Christians do sin, sometimes grievously, and we need God's grace again and again(2:1-2). The elect will repent, but we only know our election by our perseverance. We best not presume our election, our "born again/conversion," for we can never be so confident of our election that we stop using the means of grace. Apostasy is real, and if David had apostatized, he would have been covenantally a regenerated sinner (by circumcision) who lost that regeneration, lost his relationship with God, who fell away in keeping with Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-39. He would not have lost "born again/conversion,"⁵⁵ having never had it.

Notice one other interesting aspect of "born again/conversion" in 1 John: one is not born again by faith, but one has faith because he is born again (5:1; see also James 1:18). There are no instructions in 1 John (or anywhere in John) regarding how to be born again since this is a sovereign work of God. John gives the evidence of such a birth, not the means to obtain it.

Romans 6:4-6

Romans 6:4-6 is also conceptually parallel to Titus 3:5. In baptism our old life has died in Christ, and we have been raised to newness of life. This is the covenantal aspect of regeneration in baptism ("washing of regeneration") with the accompanying grace that grants us victory over sin ("renewal of the Holy Spirit"). Baptism places us in this relationship with Christ. Moreover, there is the implied work of the Spirit that "the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin."

When I was in seminary, we used to debate whether Romans 6 was Spirit baptism or water baptism. We could not conceive the two being inherently connected. But to ask that question is to assume a Gnostic distinction between the

⁵⁴ John Calvin, the last volume in his commentary series that includes 1 John, pp. 213-4. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵ This goes beyond our study of Titus 3:5 and regeneration, but 1 John was written to give us assurance of salvation (5:13 with 2:3-4; 3:6-10; 4:7-8; etc). One who is being disobedient is not supposed to have assurance of salvation. Moreover, in 1 John assurance is both objective (what one believes: 2:22-23; 4:1-6; 5:1; etc) and subjective (what one does: 2:3-4; 3:6-10; 4:7-8; etc). The Book of Common Prayer has both aspects. In Holy Communion in particular, we have the confession of our sins with absolution (subjective) and then confess the one true faith in the Nicene Creed (objective). This service is a great means of grace for assurance of salvation!

outward and the inward, between the physical and the spiritual, that the New Testament does not allow. One infers the other; they go together. As in Titus 3:5 where the “washing of regeneration” is baptism and the “renewal of the Spirit” is the ongoing work of the Spirit, so here we have baptism and the work of the Spirit together. In this passage we do not have any definition of how far this work of the Spirit goes.⁵⁶ Is this “born again/conversion”? It is at least those who “were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come” (Heb. 6:4-5), but it may or may not be the “born again/conversion” of 1 John.

1 Peter

Another conceptual parallel to Titus 3:5 is 1 Peter 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Like Titus 3:5, we have the careful use of prepositions here, which is characteristic of Peter’s writing.⁵⁷ So here in verse 3 we have “on the *basis* (κατά) of His mercy He has begotten us again to the *goal* (εἰς) of a living hope *through* (διὰ) the means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” “The basis for being a Christian is not a decision or the appropriation of a commandment, but a second birth established in God’s mercy, the manifestation of a new being.”⁵⁸

Surely the idea of sprinkling is covenant language. In Exodus 24:3-8 we have the idea of sprinkling the people of God by Moses with the blood of the sacrifice. In Hebrews 9:19-21, we have the Exodus passage applied to the new covenant people by the blood of Jesus. In Hebrews 10:22, the author states: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts *sprinkled* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The latter expression, “washed with pure water,” is without much doubt baptism,⁵⁹ and here it is connected with “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.” Once again we have inner cleansing and outer sacrament connected.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Romans 6-8 must be taken together, or one will get an imbalanced picture. Romans 6 gives us the principle that we are dead to sin. If that were all we had, we would despair over our sin. But Romans 7 tells us that even the great Apostle Paul struggled with indwelling sin. If we were left at this chapter, we would also despair over what to do about the struggle. But again in Romans 8 Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit enables us to put to death the deeds of the body. Putting the three chapters together gives us balance: sin’s dominion is broken (ch. 6), but we still struggle with indwelling sin (ch. 7), and the Holy Spirit gives us the victory over time (ch. 8).

⁵⁷ See 1:2: “elect on the basis (κατά) of foreknowledge, for the goal (εἰς) of obedience and sprinkling, and by the means (ἐν) of the sanctification of the Spirit.”

⁵⁸ Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 1978, p. 81. I find Goppelt’s works fascinating.

⁵⁹ TDNT, 6:983.

⁶⁰ TDNT, 3:304.

Similarly here in 1 Peter 1:2-5, we have baptism in the background as seen in the word “sprinkle” and in “born again.”⁶¹ As patristic scholar J. N. D. Kelly states, “After the middle of the 2nd century, baptism is regularly portrayed by the fathers as ‘regeneration.’”⁶² Here the idea of “begotten again” is covenantal as seen from “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” and in the fact that this new birth is through the resurrection of Christ, which means that it is accomplished objectively in what Christ did 2,000 years ago, not subjectively in us (at least in this passage). Peter “does not have conversion in mind but baptism [which] includes all persons.”⁶³

When we arrive at verse 23 (“having been born again, not *of* corruptible seed but incorruptible, *through* the word of God which lives and abides forever”), we see the personal, subjective aspect of this birth, appropriated through faith in the Gospel, as verse 25 states (“Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you”). Again, the prepositions are carefully written: We are born *from* (ἐκ) the source of incorruptible seed, *through* (διὰ) the word, which is the Gospel. The “seed,” like “God” in 1 John 3:9, is the source of the birth that gives rise to faith in the Gospel, and that is “born again/conversion.” Selwyn accurately observes:

[We must do] justice to the distinction between the prepositions [from, ἐκ] and [through, διὰ] which lie so close together. The supernatural origin or source from which believers have been begotten again is not the Word . . . but God’s creative *grace*, the Word being the means of their regeneration.⁶⁴

Murray J. Harris, in his classic article “Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” draws the same conclusion on “from” and “through” here: “In 1 Peter 1:23 regeneration is said to have its origin or source (*ek*) in an act of immortal procreation or in imperishable seed, but is effected by means of (*dia*) the living and abiding word of God.”⁶⁵ The Gospel includes the resurrection of Christ, which was given in 1:3. When one is baptized, he is placed into this covenant and is “regenerated” in the Lord’s resurrection; that is, he is objectively in a living relationship with Him. Then a time comes when one receives the Gospel for himself, at which time he is “born again/conversion.” Of course, in the case of adults, profession of faith is presumed and conversion precedes baptism, but the two (baptism and conversion) are still connected, one implying the other.

⁶¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 1969, p. 46. Outstanding commentary. Get everything by Kelly you can find.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶³ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, p. 84.

⁶⁴ Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 1964, p. 150. This is considered one of the best commentaries ever done on 1 Peter. Selwyn was a Cambridge scholar.

⁶⁵ Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:1176. This is an outstanding treatment of prepositions in the New Testament that all NT scholars refer to. Murray Harris now has a complete book on this topic that should be read and kept close for looking up prepositions: Murray Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament* (A.D. 2012).

We see these ideas clearly in 1 Peter 3:18-22 where the Apostle states that “baptism now saves us,” and in case we put too much emphasis on the rite, he adds that it is not just the outward rite (“not the removal of the filth of the flesh”) but the inward conscience (“but the answer of a good conscience toward God”). Once again, both aspects come together: baptismal, covenantal regeneration and a good conscience, “born again/conversion.” Both are through the resurrection of Christ.

Efficacy of Baptism

The 1928 baptismal office is slightly different for the infant and the adult, but the grace received is the same.

When we use the 1928 baptismal office for an **infant**, we say these words:

We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this child with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church. And humbly we beseech thee to grant, that he, being dead unto sin, may live unto righteousness, and being buried with Christ in his death, may also be partaker of his resurrection; so that finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, he may be an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When we use the 1928 baptismal office for an **adult**, we say these words:

Well-beloved, you have come hither desiring to receive holy Baptism. We have prayed that our Lord Jesus Christ would vouchsafe to receive you, to release you from sin, to sanctify you with the Holy Ghost, to give you the kingdom of heaven, and everlasting life.

Or, baptism for either **infant or adult**:

Almighty and everlasting God, heavenly Father, we give thee humble thanks, That thou has vouchsafed to call us To the knowledge of thy grace, and faith in thee: Increase this knowledge, And confirm this faith in us evermore. Give thy Holy Spirit to *this child* (or, *thy Servant*), that *he* [she] may be born again, And be made *an heir* of everlasting salvation; Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Holy Spirit, Now and forever. Amen.

We can see that the grace is the same whether infant or adult is baptized. We see that “regeneration” is connected with adoption as a child of God, incorporation into His holy Church. That much is stated as fact. Furthermore, it is asked that the one baptized “may be partaker of his resurrection” and inherit eternal life. But Peter Toon pulls his punch when he says: “The question arises as to whether Luther in Germany and Cranmer in England (with their colleagues) intended their liturgical prayers of thanksgiving (for regeneration having occurred) to be taken

in a simple, literal sense in all cases or whether they were using the language in a hypothetical sense. The answer must be the second alternative.”⁶⁶

While “hypothetical” may be too strong a word, and while there is true incorporation into the Church at baptism, nevertheless we see that Toon understands potential language to be in the BCP. To restate the Prayer Book service above, everyone who is rightly baptized is incorporated into His Church and receives the grace of adoption, has the working of the Spirit in his life, and is formally under the new covenant which includes forgiveness of sins. Whether that working is also “born again/conversion,” electing grace on an individual basis, is assumed, but in fact may latter prove, if the person apostatizes, not to be the case. This rests with the mystery of God and His sovereign grace. “Born again/conversion” could take place at baptism, but it is not *necessarily* so connected. There is mystery here as we do not know how far the inward working of the Spirit can go without actual “born again/conversion,” but Hebrews 6:4-6 and Hebrews 10:26-39 indicates that there can be considerable working and one can still fall away.

From Titus 3:5, baptismal regeneration and the renewal of the Spirit are connected under one roof, so to speak. Paul speaks of the work of the Spirit in Titus 3:5 and Romans 6 as necessarily connected with baptism, but we should not necessarily infer “born again/conversion” from his statements.

We see the same grammatical structure in John 3:5. Indeed, in John’s writings, the work of the Spirit is “born again/conversion,” and he connects the rite with the Spirit (“born of water and the Spirit”). For John, the baptized person is assumed to have both, for they infer one another. Yet sometimes John can speak of the work of the Spirit apart from baptism (John 1:12-13; 1 John) though we should never think that John has them so separated in his mind that one can one without the other.

Likewise Peter can speak of being “born again” as incorporation into Christ in 1:3 but also of conversion in 1:23 and 3:21.

The Apostles were not given to our subtlety of expression, but thought of the sacraments and the attending grace as being one. Thus, they move effortlessly from one to the other, sometimes connecting them, sometimes warning about apostatizing after one has received them, rarely disconnecting them.⁶⁷ They un-

⁶⁶ Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration*, 1987, pp. 114-5. This is a thorough study of regeneration biblically and historically. The weakness is that he does not give detailed exegesis of texts, but the strength is that he covers all the main views: patristic (by water and the Spirit); reformation (by word, Spirit, and water); Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican (these 3 he classifies as baptismal regeneration); Reformed (effectual calling), Puritans (no classification given), and modern evangelicals (a decision for Christ). Very interesting book.

⁶⁷ One could see Paul’s statements in Romans 2:26-3:3 where he reasons that though circumcision was profitable for the Jews, it would be unprofitable if they did not keep covenant with God.

derstood the incarnation better than we do, for in the incarnation God added to Himself His creation in the form of a perfect man so that grace came by Himself and by His creation. Here we have the perfect unity of grace with sacrament, of the spiritual with the physical, if we may speak thusly.

It is controversy that has made the Church define such concepts so closely, and this is a need for our day. But for the Apostles, it seems that they thought of the sacraments as *channels* —to use our language—of grace. They were not empty symbols only to be remembered (Baptist view), for then they would not be needed at all. In this case, the physical and the gracious would be Gnostically separated from one another, implicitly denying the incarnation.⁶⁸ Also, they were not symbols to think about so that we could receive grace in the context of thinking about the sacraments but quite apart from them (Reformed view).⁶⁹ Moreover, they were not such instruments of grace that quite magically and apart from faith one could receive grace just by the mechanics (Roman Catholic view).⁷⁰ No, the sacraments were channels of grace to such an extent that grace was received through them though yet by faith (Anglican), whether the faith of the adult or of the infant through his/her representatives. (See “their faith” in Matthew 9:2.)⁷¹

“Regeneration,” as we have used the word, is objective, occurring at baptism, is incorporation into the church, always has grace that operates in the heart of the recipient of the baptized, but not necessarily “born again/conversion.” Once one is “born again/converted,” he cannot lose that, and will persevere to the end. “Baptism” and “born again/converted” may or may not coincide in time; that is it up to God. In infants who are baptized, one presumes the best, but we do not know the state of the infant until he matures and embraces the faith himself. Two infants may receive the covenant equally even as both Jacob and Esau were circumcised, but later God said:

Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated (Rom. 9:13).

Yet both Jacob and Esau were treated equally in the covenant.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus said in John 8 to those who hated Him, who were covenant seed: “I know that you are Abraham's seed, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you” (John 8:37), and then He added, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44).

⁶⁸ This would be docetism, Christ only seemed to have a body. Thus the physical was completely irrelevant.

⁶⁹ This would be liturgical Nestorianism, two independent sources of grace with a leaning toward docetism.

⁷⁰ This would be Eutychianism, the joining of the spiritual and physical into one new thing.

⁷¹ This would seem to be truly Chalcedonian, two natures joined in one Person, the natures remaining what they were before the joining.

Moreover, “not all Israel is Israel” (Rom. 9:6), and yet all Israel was in the covenant. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, all Israel was baptized into Moses, the greatest personal type of Christ in the Old Testament, when they came out of Egypt, and all Israel had Holy Communion (1 Cor. 10:3-4). But “with **most** of them God was not well pleased”, and they **fell** out of the covenant (1 Cor. 10:8, 23,000 “**fell**” in one day). Moreover, we are to “take heed lest we **fall**” from grace (1 Cor. 10:12-13; see also about falling from grace in Heb. 12:15; Gal. 5:4).

Indeed, we never know the heart of anyone this side of eternity. In adults who come for baptism, we again presume “born again/conversion,” but we do not know for sure. But we must recognize the objective side of God’s grace in baptism, in what we are terming “regeneration” if we are faithful to Holy Scripture, to the Book of Common Prayer, to the Reformers, and to our heritage as Anglicans. We must also recognize the subjective side of God’s grace in what we are calling “born again/conversion” if we are faithful to Holy Scripture, to the language of the BCP, to the Thirty-Nine Articles, and to the evangelical faith in distinction to Rome. It is the balance of the two that gives us not only a balance of Holy Scripture but also of the sacraments and of Anglicanism. Where we lack for language is that “regeneration” always has its subjective also, where the baptized person necessarily has the “renewal of the Holy Spirit,” and this implies but does not necessitate “born again/conversion,” at least in my view. Likewise, one is not to think of “born again/conversion” apart from baptism/regeneration in the context of the Church.

Conclusion

If one is “born again/converted” apart from baptism and the Church, we have subjectivity, the Church as irrelevant, individualism with each individual being “born again/converted” because *he* says so, not because Christ through His Church says so. There can be no Church discipline over such autonomous persons, for they began their life without the Church and can continue quite well without it. However, one is not to be considered “born again/converted” apart from the Church’s baptism, though in fact it may have occurred in a living room. One is not a Christian only because he says he is, but because the Church says he is. The “born again/conversion” experience has been so emphasized by evangelicals that baptism and the Church have been made almost entirely irrelevant. In this view, grace is by word only, not word and sacrament, salvation is an abstract gift apart from Christ, being something that He allegedly grants much like we would receive a ten dollar bill from someone. Rather, the sacraments teach us that salvation is being united to Christ, and that happens only by being baptized into His body, His Church. It is only in union with Christ that we are Christians,

not as individuals, but it is as individuals that we are “born again/converted.” It is not either-or but both-and.

Likewise, this balance between “regeneration” and “born again/conversion” guards against the view of Rome where if one has “regeneration” he necessarily has “born again/conversion.” In this view, the Church becomes not only necessary to one’s salvation but also the sole channel of grace from God. Here we have grace by sacraments but not by the word, not *necessarily* by faith. Furthermore, it must be a certain church with certain physical qualifications of touch from the Apostles that qualifies one to be a Christian. Now we have salvation by the magic touch. If you have been touched by someone who has been touched by someone who has been touched by the Apostles, you are a Christian; otherwise, you are lost.

By contrast, evangelicalism has always recognized true Christians who believe the biblical Gospel, recognizing the necessity of individual conversion, but in the context of a church that preaches the Gospel and administers the sacraments biblically. As John Calvin rightly stated, “Do not call God your Father if the Church is not your mother.”

Now from the Declaration of Principles in the Reformed Episcopal Church’s Book of Common Prayer, there is the statement that “regeneration” is not inseparably connected with baptism. If we understand “regeneration” as a synonym for “born again/conversion,” the statement is true. But if we understand regeneration as incorporation into the Church, regeneration is inseparable from baptism.

So, is one in a relationship with God the Father through the Son, being incorporated into God’s people with circumcision/baptism? Without a doubt that is so. Can one lose that relationship? Yes, apostasy is real. Can one be restored? Of course, except for the unpardonable sin, which is not the topic of this paper. Do the number of the elect increase and decrease with those who are added to the body of Christ and then fall away? No, the number of the elect and the individuals who are the elect are set in concrete and cannot be changed. But “not all Israel is Israel,” or “not all the elect is elect.”

AMEN. Ω