

# “Denominationalism”

A Series of Six letters to a “Church of Christ” preacher who had advertised in a local newspaper.

## Letter No. 1, Feb. 20, 2004

To Whom it may concern,

I do not know who wrote the article in last week's (2/16/04) Keller newspaper, but I could not help but be stirred by "*What Does the Bible Say About - undenominational Christianity?*" Truly, Christ wanted Christians to be in unity while we are down here on this earth representing Him who died for us—John 17:11,21-23.

I was stirred, first of all, because of its strong condemnation of "denominationalism." In fact, the closer I looked at the article the more I realized that this is probably one of the strongest attacks I ever saw against this obvious carnality in Christendom. You said:

"The sin of denominationalism is damnable,"  
"We negate plain Bible teaching and make excuses for such,"  
"Our fruit is exposed and open for judgment,"  
"Paul would associate (denominations) with a perverted gospel,"  
"Which makes for a perverted people,"  
"Wresting the Scriptures to one's own destruction,"  
"We become blind and eventually reprobate."

Now, the second reason I was stirred was because right up there on top was the name of the "Church" who published this unusually strong condemnation against denominationalism—

### **"Roanoke Church of Christ"**

Of course, the word "denomination" comes from the Latin *de*, (to separate), and *nominare*, (to name); hence—"to name apart." "Denominationalism" is simply the outward result of the disease of "sectarianism," or the "choosy spirit." Denominationalism is as old as the church itself. In the first century the apostle Paul dwelt with it very effectively where it had infected the Christians in the city of Corinth. They were naming themselves apart from each other—"I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ."

Now all of these names were perfectly good Biblical names! But in the Bible they were never to be used to categorize Christians *apart* from each other. Thus, the carnal Corinthian Christians were abusing and misusing these names! Paul begins his stern rebuke with the last group who were haughtily using the name of Christ to distinguish themselves from all the rest. "Is Christ divided?" he said.

In the world today there are many professing Christian groups who still use the name of "Christ" to divide themselves from all other Christians. A few of the more popular ones are:

"The Church of Christ - Scientist"  
"The Church of Jesus Christ - Latter Day Saints"  
"The Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ - Apostolic"

"The Churches of Christ - In Christian Union"

"The Churches of Christ—

(Misc. and sundry groups, divided and sub-divided  
into innumerable splits—each claiming to be authentic)"

No intelligent Bible reader can fail to realize that all these modern groups have abused the name of Christ. Even more disgusting is the fact that they sit in judgment upon all other Christians.

In the Bible the expression "Church of Christ" is never used. Some deduct that it could be used from the singular expression in Romans "the churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). However, this is clearly not used as a name of any Christian group. It is simply one description among the many that are used.

"churches of God" - 3 times

"church of God" - 8 times

"church of the living God" - 1 time

"church of the firstborn" - 1 time

"churches of the Gentiles" - 1 time

"churches of Christ" - 1 time

"churches of the saints" - 1 time

"church or churches of certain localities" - many times

"church" (alone) - many times

"the body of Christ" - 1 time

"the church which is Christ's body" - 1 time

"the body" - many times (approx. 33 times)

Now this is "the pattern established in the New Testament." That means that you are going to be guilty of "twisting the Scriptures" to justify the exclusive use of the words "Church of Christ" as the name of your group. In fact, you qualify, par excellence, as a "denominationalist!" Indeed, you are self-condemned! Christ said, "*by thy words thou shalt be condemned*," Matt. 12:37.

Jack W. Langford

Feb. 20, 2004

(I received a response from a Mr. Braswell the minister at the Church who sponsored his article. He indicated that he was "confused over (my) issue with them using a Scriptural name to designate who they are. Is there something wrong with us utilizing the name, "Church of Christ," designating whose church we are, not what denomination we are associated with? This is a bit confusing to me...Sir, our group is the Lord's group. And we call ourselves such...We are not opposed to having a Scriptural designation for a church, but we are opposed to denominationalism.")

Letter No. 2, March 4, 2004

Dear Mr. Braswell,

I take it that you are the author of the articles in the Keller newspaper on the subject of "undenominational Christianity." In the newspaper the name of the author was not given, but I appreciate your response to my letter. I hope that this second letter of mine will take away the "confusion" in your mind about what I meant in the first letter. Apparently I need to clarify some things, so bear with me as I endeavor to do that.

Over the years in the past I thought it very interesting to collect articles written by notable preachers, especially denominational preachers, on the great sin of sectarian denominationalism. I made this collection into a small booklet. In other words, a great many denominational preachers have admitted that denominationalism, in the light of Biblical truth, is sin and damaging to the cause of Christ. (If you would like, I will send you a free printed copy.) I am very familiar with the fact that many preachers in man-made sectarian "Church-anity" clearly saw the sin of dividing the body of Christ—but were not going to do anything about it. They only admit it on appropriate occasions, yet do not cease to practice it lest they lose their prestigious positions. In fact, many of them will turn right around and try to justify the existence of their particular sects.

Now, when I saw your article I observed the very same thing! On the one hand, you very clearly, properly and severely condemn denominationalism as "damnable." But then on the other hand, it is obvious to me that you are a part of a denomination yourself! Of course, I don't think you are about to let yourself admit it! The evidence should be obvious to you, if you would simply allow yourself to step out of your "Church of Christ" tradition, and stand in my place and look back at the facts of the case. Can you do that?

First of all, you take the descriptive words, "church of Christ," or "churches of Christ" and change it into *THE NAME* of your group. You must admit, **the fact is** this is never done in the Bible—not one single time! In addition, you will use the name *EXCLUSIVELY* from all the other descriptions of the church used in the Bible, most often going so far as to incorporate it with the State as a "Non-profit Religious Corporation," with that exclusive title! **The facts are** this is never done in the Bible example of the early Christian churches. Finally, all of this is, **in fact,** the very heart and essence of the *DENOMINATIONAL SPIRIT!*

Like the apostle Paul who spoke to the knowledgeable Jewish teachers of his day in this manner—"Thou therefore, which teaches another, teachest thou not thyself? And thou preachest a man should not steal, doest thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, doest thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, doest thou commit sacrilege?" (Rom. 2:21,22). So will I speak to preachers in the so-called "Church of Christ"—"Thou that abhorrest denominationalism, doest thou practice denominationalism?"

Then you ask, "Is there something wrong with us utilizing the name, 'Church of Christ,' designating whose church we are, not what denomination we are associated with?" And I answer, Yes! It is all wrong! In the Bible, "church(es) of Christ" is not *intended to be a name*. It is merely one of the many descriptions of the church.

Let me rehearse this again very slowly:

**First of all**, we both profess that the examples of the early church, as written in the Scriptures, are to be followed today! If we don't follow that Biblical example we will be following any human tradition that we choose and rationalize. This human rationalization is what brings the denominational confusion that we see today.

**Secondly**, in the Biblical example the expression "churches of Christ" is obviously *not a NAME*, and was *never used as a NAME*. Furthermore, when the carnal Corinthian believers used the personal name of "Christ" to cleverly divide and distinguish themselves apart from those who were using the name of "Paul," "Apollon," and "Cephas," they were rebuked—"IS CHRIST DIVIDED?" In other words, the precious name of Christ should never be used in a divisive manner! Today in Christendom it is quite popular to use the name of Christ in a divisive manner. I listed in my previous letter just a few of the groups that are doing it. It is sickening to see it! You would admit that the vast majority of them don't even know Christ. In addition, the very moment you convert the expression "church of Christ," and make it the *NAME* "Church of Christ" for your particular group, you have, in fact, "denominated" yourself!

**Thirdly**, in the Biblical example we find many descriptions of the church that Christ is building. They all are to be used only as descriptions, and not one of them is to be singled out for *exclusive use* as a name! This is for our protection so as to not fall into the hands of a spirit of divisiveness. If we truly love Christ and His church, we will jealously guard this privilege and properly use all the descriptions. Thus we would not be listed in any of the various "Handbooks of Denominations" like the so-called "Church of Christ" is. The various authors who list the many denominations are only listing what they SEE you are doing, and they are not concerned about any human, religious rational for doing it. They are perfectly justified in listing the "Church of Christ" as a denomination in all their various books.

Therefore, if Christians are (as you said) "to unite on the single Cause of Christ detailed in the Bible, and only in the Bible," then we must *follow* the Biblical example and use *all* the designations God has used for the church. These designations are the common property of all believers, and none of them are to be singled out for *exclusive use* as a *sectarian name*.

You say, "Sir, our group is the Lord's group." If it is the Lord's group, as seen in the Scriptures, then it would use all the descriptions that the Lord has given for the church, and use them just as the Scriptures do. If it does not do this, then it could only be another denominational sect. I am for using the Biblical designations for the church of Jesus Christ just as they are used in the Bible, and in no other way! I consider the Biblical example to be perfectly mandatory for Christians today. Furthermore, I consider the Biblical examples to be very practical and spiritually beneficial. You can find no Biblical example for doing as you are doing! If so, where is it???

I have made myself clear, and if I have not contended for what the Bible says and exemplifies, then please feel free to correct any statement I have made.

Yours, in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, Jack W. Langford

(Braswell responded by attacking me personally as being “presumptuous.” He then launched into a self justification and a new definition of what a denomination is. I will deal with his arguments in my next letter.)

### **Letter No. 3, March 22, 2004**

Dear Mr. Braswell,

Greetings in the name that is above every name—the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:9). Not only do I come to you in that name but my intentions are to be an honest representation of the truths that the Head of the church has given. There is no romance equal to the pursuit of finding and walking in those truths that Jesus Christ gave for the members of the church which is His body. Because of the debris of nearly two thousand years of human reasoning and tradition, most people reading the scriptures only understand them through the discoloration of that tradition.

There is no greater example of this than in the discussion before us on the subject of the church itself. The Puritans who first came to this country was one group that earnestly pursued the search for original Christianity. Consequently, they rejected the pagan holidays, Priestcraft, Romanism, Church of England, etc. In addition, they would not build church buildings. When needed, they built meeting houses and that is what they called them, "meeting house." They recognized that in the Bible the church was people, not a physical building. They would not even use the King James Version of the Bible because of the clerical words used such as "Easter," "bishop," and "church." The English word "church" (from the Greek- *kurios*, meaning lord) was really not a translation of the Greek word "ekklesia," (meaning assembly). In England, because of church tradition, they called the Cathedrals "the Lord's (house)," or "church." This obviously confused the building with the people and we have suffered with the confusion ever since.

There is no evidence that the early Christians ever built "Churches" and put names out in front! The reason is self evident; the true Christian churches were the assemblies themselves, not the buildings. Furthermore, the many designations of the church were never meant to be used as NAMES! (It seems you are still confused over this.) Also, the congregations in every city were well known, for their testimonies were heard everywhere, usually loud and clear.

Now we all must realize that this is the Biblical testimony—and example for true Christians today in 2004, is it not!? The Apostle Paul soberly charged the divisive Corinthian saints (and beyond them, saints in every age), "Let every man take heed how he builds thereon...Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day (God's judgment court) shall declare it, for it shall be examined by the fire (of God's judgment)." (I Cor. 3: 10-15).

Thankfully, we can take our ideas and doctrine to court right now and deal with them honestly in the light of God's Word (blueprints) and judge ourselves and put away the false confusion of human traditions. Otherwise we will suffer great embarrassment in that future judgment day, for it is most certainly coming.

You say, I am "presumptuous and without proper evidence" for charging you with being a denomination! That is a lie and a dodge!

First of all, you don't follow the Biblical example!

Secondly, I can give you at least ten different books on denominations in America that list you as a denomination! (And the reason I say ten is merely because that exhausted the library's catalogue on the subject.)

Thirdly, the name "Church of Christ" is never found in the Bible!

Fourthly, the words "churches of Christ" are not a name, but a description.

Fifthly, there are many other descriptions of the church in the Bible, used many more times than the description "churches of Christ," and you choose to avoid using any of them as your name. And this is the very essence of sectarian denominationalism. The problem is, Mr. Braswell, you will not judge yourself!

Since you don't fare too well from the Biblical perspective, you then come up with a new definition for a "denomination." You say it means a group that teaches "heretical, divisive, creedal doctrines," and the group may or may not use a scriptural name. Well, I am very sorry, Mr. Braswell, but I could not find that definition of denominationalism in any dictionary at my disposal, nor in any of the books about denominationalism that I have ever laid hands on! Would you please reference that definition for me? Where in the world did you find it? All the reference works that I have mentioned simply give the original meaning that I gave to you in my very first letter—simply "to name apart." Would you please give me the reference work that lists denominations on the basis of whether or not they teach false doctrine?? I am eagerly waiting for this!

Of course, if teaching false doctrine is further evidence of being a denomination, then I am quite sure that you qualify there as well, because your doctrine of obtaining salvation by *faith* and *works* is utterly disgraceful to the gospel taught in the Bible!

Sincerely Yours,  
Jack W. Langford

(Mr. Braswell answers me in real frustration and again attempts self justification for the use of the words "Church of Christ" as a legitimating name, "but not a denomination." He also attacks the books that defines denominationalism. And he also says that the books that lists all the denominations as not being that reliable. He assures me we should not trust what secular books say. He refuses to answer any of the pertinent facts that I gave and asserts that he will not write to me again unless I answer his questions about how to obtain salvation.)

## Letter No. 4, March 28, 2004

Dear Mr. Braswell,

When I look into the Scriptures concerning the church of Jesus Christ our Lord, whether in the four Gospels, or the book of Acts history, or in any of the epistles of Paul or the other apostles, I cannot find, and I dare say, no one else can find either, a church that exclusively chooses to use the name “Church of Christ.” It is simply not there! In fact, the nature of instructions and examples concerning the church life in these Scriptures would prohibit and condemn any professed believers from doing this divisive, sectarian and denominational action!

Consequently, when I turn to modern church historians and read that since about 1906 a group or groups of professed Christians have, in fact, been so designating themselves, it becomes obvious to any honest person that this action is due to later human reasoning and tradition rather than to the Bible. Furthermore, this action, no matter what the supposed motive behind it, constitutes “denominationalism.” The dictionary definition of denominationalism settles the issue of what constitutes a “denomination.” Though the Bible does not use this word, yet it very clearly gives us an illustration of “carnal Christians” doing just that in the city of Corinth. It is sinful and wrong to do and brings confusion to the cause of Christ. Professed Christians today who practice this sin are writing their own history! And that history is their own indictment!

Now you ask me several different questions on the subject of salvation. I can give you Biblical answers.

“Where is the New Testament example of one post Acts 2 that was saved before obedience?” This is an interesting question since it has some *qualifiers* to it.

It first of all presumes that Acts 2 marks the beginning of a different plan of salvation. I don’t know how you could prove that, especially since the Scriptures very plainly say that the “so great salvation” “had its commencement in being spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard” (Hebrews 2:3). Therefore when we turn to the Gospel records of salvation being spoken of by the Lord we have many beautiful records. Here is a sampling:

1) “And He said to her, thy sins are forgiven...thy faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50); 2) “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the sick of the palsy, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’” (Mark 2:5); 3) “This day is salvation come to this house...for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9,10); 4) “And Jesus said to her, neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:11); 5) “Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him...and many more believed because of His own word; and said to the woman, now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is the Savior of the world” (John 4:39-42); 6) “And the publican, standing far off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:13,14); 7) “Jesus... said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’...And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He Who is talking with you.’ Then he answered, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9:35-38); 8) “And he said to Jesus, ‘Lord remember me when you come

into Your Kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise’” (Luke 23: 42,43), etc., etc.

Did all of these people “obey” Christ? Of course they did! They “obeyed from their hearts that form of doctrine which was delivered to them!” (Rom. 6:17). I can well understand why you do not ask for these examples—they condemn your false ideology of how one must get saved!

But, let us see if it is really any different in the book of Acts. The first incident of salvation that gives us a detailed, step by step, presentation of the gospel and its resultant salvation is that of the first Gentiles who were saved. This is very important to the early Jewish Christian churches and therefore there was a detailed focus upon it by the inspired writer and the apostle Peter as well. Are you ready to go through it step by inspired step? Acts 10:44-48. Beginning at verse 44:

1.) “While Peter was still speaking these words.” What “words” was Peter speaking? The inspired account of Luke was written in a very orderly manner. Whenever this event is repeated it will follow the same order. Obviously Peter had only begun his message (Acts 11:15). He was only about one minute into his message when he was interrupted. The very last “words” to come out of his mouth are recorded in verse 43, “To Him (Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Now the eager Gentiles were very carefully listening to Peter’s message because they had been told ahead of time that he would give them “words whereby you shall be saved and all your house” (Acts 11:14). That means they were prepared in heart to hear Peter. Apparently they were believing every word that came out of Peter’s mouth, and when he got to the place of “remission of sins” to everyone “who believes in Christ,” they believed with true heart faith and trust in Christ. So, at this precise point Peter was interrupted by a beautiful phenomenon that was known and understood by the church. It was a very special gift that was given to the church, called “speaking in tongues.”

2.) “...The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” Peter, and the other Jewish witnesses present, realized that the Holy Spirit had suddenly been given to these Gentiles because they heard the Gentiles glorifying God and speaking with a miraculous gift given to the church called “tongues.”

Now what is the precise meaning of this? Peter, himself, gives a twofold commentary on this event which should settle any dispute about it.

First, let us look at his remarks in Acts 15:7-9 which were made before all the leadership in the whole church at Jerusalem. Peter tells emphatically that the Gentiles had heard, “the *gospel* and *believe(d)*, so God Who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, *purifying their hearts by faith*.” This makes it unmistakably clear that the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was first of all the evidence that their hearts were right in the sight of God, and therefore God had “purified (to cleanse or wash) their hearts” because of their genuine faith and trust. The “purification,” of course, was inward and spiritual and gave the gentiles the “remission of their sins” as stated in the gospel proclamation by the prophets.

Secondly, let us look at Peter’s remarks in Acts 11:15-17, where Peter is responding to

the expressed concern of his Jewish brethren, that he had gone into the home and had eaten with Gentiles, which was strictly forbidden by the Jewish Law. Peter rehearsed the whole matter to them and said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 1:5). This obviously meant that the Gentiles had been “Baptized by the Holy Spirit,” just like the apostles had at the time of Acts 2. This would explain how the Gentiles could speak with tongues, because tongues was a gift to the church, and to exercise this gift they must now be in the church. In fact, that is expressly what the baptism of the Holy Spirit does according to the apostle Paul, “By one Spirit are we all baptized *into one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13).

In addition, this clearly means that the Gentiles had OBEYED the gospel! The Scriptures plainly say that God only “gives the Spirit to them that OBEY Him” (Acts 5:32). The “gospel” that Peter says the Gentiles “heard” told them what they should do—“to believe on Christ!”

In Acts 11:17 Peter goes on to say, “If God therefore gave them the same gifts as he gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” No doubt, this last thought was the basis for Peter remaining with the gentiles and also commanding that they should be water baptized. Peter’s thoughts had taken him back to Pentecost and a few days before when Christ contrasted John’s water baptism with the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is actually very significant, for it clearly demonstrates that there are only two baptisms in the book of Acts time frame—John’s water baptism, and Holy Spirit baptism.

Just before Pentecost Christ said, “John baptized with water,” but in a few days they would be “baptized by the Holy Spirit.” There are just two baptisms here, not three. There are not two water baptisms! Just one, and that is John’s. Just after the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost there are still just two baptisms. The first members of the church of Jesus Christ never got another water baptism—just John’s, which they had previously received, and now they also had Holy Spirit baptism. This is why some three or four years later at the time of the salvation of the first Gentiles there are still just two baptisms—John’s water baptism, and Holy Spirit baptism!

So Peter commands these Gentiles to receive John’s water baptism for that is the only water baptism supplied in the context, and it is supplied twice. First of all, in the context of Peter’s message he told the gentiles of John’s baptism—Acts 10:37. Secondly, that is the water baptism that comes to Peter’s mind as he tells us in Acts 11:17. No matter what water baptism it is, we know what it is NOT for! It is not for the remission of sins because the Gentiles already had this! It is not to place them into Christ because they are already in Christ and in His body, the church! It is not to give them the Holy Spirit because they already had the Spirit! It is not to “obey” the gospel because they had already obeyed it!

Then you ask, “Can one be raised with Christ without being buried with Christ?” (Col. 2:12). Let us read the passage! “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through the faith in the working of God, Who raised Him from the dead.” Obviously this is both a spiritual circumcision

(“made without hands”) and a spiritual baptism—“through the faith in the working of God.” There is not a drop of water in the passage. It is a perfect identification, not a shallow imitation!

Then you ask, “Can one be saved without being a member of the Lord’s church?” The only way to be saved, Mr. Braswell, is like the first gentiles were saved. In addition, they were simultaneously baptized into Christ and into His church, and spoke in tongues to prove it!

Sincerely Yours, Jack W. Langford

(Braswell avoids all in my last letter and chooses to ask “Three simple questions.” He also sends a published Bible study on the New Covenant plan of salvation to see if I would answer that!)

## Letter No. 5, April 15, 2004

Dear Mr. Braswell,

You chose to avoid answering my last letter, and yet you choose to ask more questions. Whether or not you really want answers to your questions, I am still going to give them. I love the truth. I love to give it out to other sincere people, and even to people who may not be sincere, because I know that they will face the answer again at the judgment bar of God. And, believe it or not, I love you, Mr. Braswell, and I do hope that you could see the truth of these matters. I am not the one who has a flaw in reasoning regarding denominationalism. By the way, one author of a denominational handbook listed certain groups (including your own) under this title, "Denominational Dilemma," because though these groups sternly argue that they are not denominations, yet in reality they bear all the characteristics of the same.

First you ask about "obeying" the gospel. Of course we must "obey" the gospel. That is what the Scripture says.

Have you ever looked up that word "obey" in your lexicon, Mr. Braswell? It is very interesting to do so. Strong (#5219), Thayer, Vine, etc., all say the same thing, namely, "Obey, To listen or hear attentively as a subordinate." Of course, that is exactly what Cornelius and his household were doing as they listened to Peter give the gospel. It is therefore important to remember that the word "obey" **does not mean**, in and of itself, to do something with your **flesh**, rather to simply "Listen attentively as a subordinate"

The real question that should be asked is, "What is the gospel?" and then, "How do we obey it?"

If I asked you whether or not you obeyed a certain signal light at a major intersection, you would probably answer, "that all depends on whether the signal was *red* or *green*." If it was *green*, to obey it would be to step on the gas and go through. If it was *red*, to obey it would be to step on the brakes and stop.

In a similar way, If the gospel amounts to a system of good works, beginning with water baptism, then it is really not "good news" but a legal system of drudgery. If, on the other hand,

the gospel is the story of what God has done for the sinner through Christ, and it is offered by free grace "without works" (Eph. 2:8-10), then you can obtain it like Cornelius did through faith.

Then you ask about the "principle of 2 Timothy 2:15 regarding rightly dividing the Bible?" This is a good question on the basics of properly using the Scriptures. The Greek word translated "rightly dividing" is *orthotomeo*, a compound word from *orthos*, meaning "straight," and *temno*, meaning "to cut." Therefore "to cut straight" is the better translation. In Paul's illustration of a Christian minister as a workman who is approved of God, he must be able to "cut straight" (or handle properly) the Word of God. If a so-called minister "cuts crooked" in using the Bible, he is most certainly not approved of God. Many times human reasoning and tradition cause uninspired conclusions by so-called Bible teachers.

A prime example of not "cutting straight" is in the booklet that you sent to me entitled "The Thief on The Cross," by Perry B. Cotham. I read through some 20 pages of argument and repeated ascertains that the "New Covenant" has different terms of obtaining salvation. He says now one can only obtain remission of sins by submitting to the "terms of the Covenant," which is "Faith, Repentance and Water Baptism." He repeats this over and over again. Through it all he only quotes one passage that specifically mentions the "New Covenant" (which is mistranslated "testament") in Hebrews 9:15-17. He talked all about "a testator," "a legacy," "Heirs," "Conditions," "Witnesses," and "Executors," and most importantly he emphasizes "the conditions of the Will." But never, absolutely NEVER did he quote the text of the NEW COVENANT.

Like a great salesman, he puts on a great sales speech—but never lets you read the CONTRACT. Apparently he does not want the reader to actually read the New Covenant Contract, because if they do they will realize that the New Covenant has nothing whatsoever to do with spelling out different terms of obtaining salvation.

The specifics of the New Covenant are clearly spelled out in Hebrews 8:7-13, which is a quotation from Jeremiah 31:31-34. So now let us read the actual New Covenant contract as given by Almighty God, through the inspired prophet and through the apostle Paul.

#### **The New Covenant Promise**

Hebrews 8: v:8 "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,  
v:9 not according to the Covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My Covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.  
v:10 FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put My Law in their mind and will write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.  
v:11 None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.  
v:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

Now, Mr. Braswell, we have the actual New Covenant promise before us. Are you able to "cut straight" as to actually what it says? and not bend it or distort it out of shape? to fit some theological propaganda? I can; here goes—

1.) The New Covenant is made with a very specific people, "the house of Israel, and the house of Judah." There is no mistaking who this people is! It is the very SAME people who had the "Law Covenant" made with them!

Now the apostle Paul warns us today to "Give no offense, either to the JEWS, or to the GENTILES, or the CHURCH OF GOD" ( I Cor. 10:32). In God's sight there are three basic peoples in the world. The Jews are made up of the House of Israel and the House of Judah; the Gentiles are all other peoples in the world; the Church of God is made up of saved Jews and saved Gentiles who are recreated in Christ as "One New Man." Now the New Covenant is not made with the Gentiles, nor is it made with the Church of God!

2.) The specific time of instituting the promised New Covenant is "After those days" (v:10). In the context of Jeremiah 31:31 it is the promise that in the future God will bring back Israel's captivity, "I will bring back their captivity" (Jer. 31:23). And again, "I will watch over them to build and to plant" (Jer. 31:28). So it is clear, that after God brings back the captivity of Israel He will establish the New Covenant with them!

Though Israel is now, after nearly two thousand years, once again a nation in the land, yet its restoration as stated in Jeremiah is yet to be realized.

Of course, there is no "bringing back of captivity" for the Gentiles or the Church!

3.) The specific action or work of the New Covenant is when God will place the Law into the hearts and minds of the people of Israel, and He will truly be their God! God will furthermore be "merciful to Israel's sins." The New Covenant has nothing whatsoever to do with some new plan of salvation that is to go into effect after the death of Christ!

4.) The result of the Covenant being instituted will be the end of evangelization for as stated, "all shall know Me, says the Lord." There will absolutely be no need to go around telling people how to get saved, because all will be saved "from the least of them to the greatest."

Paul refers to this Covenant in Romans 11:25,26 where he tells us "that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (this present age). And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come to Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My COVENANT with them, when I take away their sins.'"

By the way, most all theologians (I don't know of an exception) recognize that the various Covenants that God makes are to be listed in two categories—either "*conditional*" or "*unconditional*." Either God requires something from man, or else God makes the Covenant without any condition required from man. They are normally listed as follows—The Noaic Covenant, *unconditional* (Gen. 9:8-17); The Abrahamic Covenant, *unconditional* (Gen.15); The Law Covenant, *conditional* (Exo. 19:3-6); The Palestinian (land) Covenant, *conditional* (Deut.29); the Davidic Covenant, *unconditional* (II Sam. 7:1-17); and the New Covenant, *unconditional* (Jer. 31: 31-34).

And now, Mr. Braswell, the question you must answer is—Can you come to terms with the actual, real, Biblical, rightly divided New Covenant???

Sincerely yours  
Jack W. Langford

P.S. I will concede all, if you can find "water baptism" in Mark 16:16; Math. 28:19; Acts 2:38; Acts 9:18; Acts 18:8; Acts 19:5; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:1-7; Gal. 3:27,28; and Col. 2:11,12.

or

If you can find something akin to "*for spiritual soul salvation*" or "*for remission of sins*" in Acts 8:36-39; Acts 10:47; or I Cor. 1:14-17.

(Mr. Braswell writes his last letter. He makes some new arguments that I take up in my next letter. He further asserts that my answers in my last letter are so unreasonable as to not deserve further comment. He inserted some other tracts. He signs off claiming to be a "Minister of the Gospel." Of course, it most certainly is not Paul's gospel—Galatians 1:6-9.)

## Letter No. 6, May 14, 2004

Dear Mr. Braswell, (Letter # 6)

The reason you are having a problem understanding what I am saying about "baptism" and "obedience" is because you don't want to admit the obvious truth of what I am giving. First of all, I never even remotely said I would concede "if water can be found in baptism." What I said was, to the effect, you simply don't find "water" in any of the verses I listed. And conversely, in the verses that do mention "water" baptism you don't find stated that it is for spiritual soul salvation. Now this is a very simple fact, and yet very important. There is no question whatsoever that "baptism" saves, but not *water* baptism. There is no question whatsoever that many water baptisms existed, especially in the time of the early church, but they were not for spiritual soul salvation or remission of sins. Have I made myself clear?

There are many misconceptions today about the subject of baptism. Members of the so-called "Church of Christ" almost always think "splash" every time they see the word "Baptize." This is a total lie and very stupid spiritually. In their tracts and preaching they will invariably list a series of verses where the word "baptism" is used, as if they are all talking about the very same thing. And in most cases there are different baptisms, for different purposes, in those lists.

The very first time that the Greek word for baptism is used in the New testament is in Matthew 3:1-12. And at the outset we should be warned, "**Notice**, there are **3** different **kinds** of baptism stated:"

"I indeed *baptize* you with **water** unto repentance," **No. 1.**

"But He (Messiah) will *baptize* you with the **Holy Spirit**," **No. 2.**

"...and (the Messiah will *baptize* you with) **fire.**"

**No. 3.**

It is obvious from this that the context must always tell us what KIND of baptism is in view. The word baptism does not automatically mean "splash in water." The word baptism is simply a verb of *action* and the context must supply the *element* used in the action. Obviously, different baptisms are for different purposes. This is fundamental, is it not? In fact there are many different uses of the word "baptize" in the Scriptures.

Furthermore, John the Baptist "preached the *baptism of repentance* for the **remission of sins.**" (Mark 1:4) Taking the passage literally, as it is written in precise language, this is not **water** baptism, or **Holy Spirit** baptism, or **fire** baptism, but **repentance** baptism. "Repentance" is the element that brings a person "into" a right relationship with the Lord. "Repentance is in fact a cleansing element. That makes baptism **No. 4.**

In addition Christ spoke of His **sufferings and death** on the cross as a "*baptism*," Matthew 20:18-23; Mark 10:32-40 and Luke 12:50. That makes baptism **No. 5.**

In addition, the Jewish people had inherited traditional **baptisms** that involved washing or dipping the hands, utensils, and couches before they ate a meal. These are explained in Matthew 15:1-20; 23:25,26; Mark 7:1-23 and Luke 11:37-40. Three times the Greek word "baptize" is used in these passages. That makes baptism **No. 6.**

In addition, the whole Jewish Law "consisted of a *variety* of **baptisms**," Hebrews 9:10. Here again the Greek word for baptism is used to cover all of the variety of Levitical washings, purifications, cleansings, immersions, purgings, etc. This makes baptism **No. 7 + ?**

In addition, in I Corinthians 10:1,2 there is a *figurative* use of the word "**baptized**" in describing Israel's journey through the Red sea and under the cloud. Baptism **No. 8 +.**

In addition, in I Corinthians 15 we read of a "**baptism** for the *dead*." This had to do with the Christians being willing to suffer persecution even unto death for Christ's sake. This makes baptism **No. 9 +.**

In addition, in Hebrews 6:2 we read of the summation of the whole "*doctrine* or teaching about **baptisms.**" Now this is the word used in an *all-inclusive* sense. Baptism **No. 10+.**

In addition, in accordance with the common usage in the Greek world of the word "baptized," to describe individuals who had come under the influence of certain Greek philosophers, as being "baptized *into* those *philosophers*, or in being baptized *by* the *philosophy*," so the Divinely inspired apostle Paul speaks of the Christians as having been "**baptized** *into Christ*, and *into His death*." (See Rom. 6:1-6 and Gal. 3:27). This is an immersion *into a person*, and was so commonly used in the Greek world, and had nothing whatsoever to do with any kind of a water ritual. This is baptism **No. 11 +.**

In addition, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures there was a **spiritual** "washing, cleansing, purification, etc.," often talked about. These were later called "baptisms" when translated into Greek, and when expounded upon by the so-called "early church Fathers." And it is very important to know this because it prepares us to better understand the different baptisms in the Greek Scriptures. For instance, there is what is called "Isaiah's baptism." What is that? Very

simply, Isaiah 1:16-18:

"**Wash** yourselves, and make yourselves **clean**;...come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your **sins** be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Now all admit that this washing (later called "baptism") is spiritual in nature, and involves an inward cleansing from "sins."

There is also what is called "Jeremiah's baptism." What is that? very simply, Jeremiah 2:22 and 4:14:

"For though you **wash** yourselves with *lye*, and use much *soap*, yet your **iniquity** is marked before Me, says the Lord God."

"O Jerusalem, **wash** your *heart from wickedness*, that you may be **saved**. How long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?"

Obviously Jeremiah mocks the idea of a physical washing (or baptism) to take away sins. On the other hand he cries out for the people to be baptized on the inside, in their hearts, in order to be "saved." Now if you were a Jew reading this in some later Greek translations, you would realize that there is no spiritual salvation or cleansing of sin from the outward physical baptisms, even if lye or soap is added. Yet there is an inward spiritual baptism that does bring salvation!

There is also what is called "David's baptism." What is that? Very simply Psalm 51:1-3, 7 and 10.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. **Wash** me thoroughly from my *iniquity*, and **cleanse** me from my *sin*. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me...**wash** me and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a *clean heart*, O God, and renew a *right spirit within me*."

David's baptism was obviously inward and spiritual and brought remission of sins. Furthermore, there was not a drop of physical water as used in the Law ceremonial system.

I can give you many, many other illustrations, but these should suffice. There were the many outward physical baptisms of the Law that could not take away the sins of the soul or bring spiritual soul salvation. However, there most certainly was the repeated offer of an inward, spiritual cleansing of the heart by baptism, which brings salvation and remission of sins!

Even when Jesus Christ refused the traditional "baptisms" of hands, cups, pots, etc., yet He very pointedly told them "**Cleanse** first that which is *within*." (Matt. 25:26).

Now, in light of all these fundamental truths from the Scriptures, when I come to a passage like Acts 2:38—

"Repent, and be **baptized** every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the *Holy Spirit*, for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off."

I have no trouble whatsoever in knowing what kind of a baptism this is! It is obviously

inward and spiritual! All must admit, *a spiritual transaction* took place involving the "remission of sins." 1.) Sins is not dirt on the physical body. 2.) Sins are from the heart and inward. 3.) The *cleansing* of those sins is positively, unmistakably a spiritual transaction. 4.) The transaction that remits these sins is a "baptism." 5.) The baptism of necessity must be spiritual and inward, not outwardly in the flesh! In confirmation, it plainly says, "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," in doing this. 6.) The apostle Paul says in I Cor. 6:11, "But you are **washed...in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.**" That settles it! Acts 2:38 is the common, inward, spiritual washing or baptism that brings remission of sins. It could be no other—not even if you added soap to it!

From the Day of Pentecost onward the inward spiritual baptism of the soul, which has always existed, is now preached in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and automatically has the greater "baptism of the Holy Spirit" incorporated with it, which was the "promise of the Father," and was precisely what happened to Cornelius and his household a few years later. Cornelius obviously had the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," which caused Peter to also realize that "his heart was purified by faith." These two spiritual operations are fused together and thus become the "ONE BAPTISM" that specifically has to do with "The Unity of The Spirit" (Eph. 4:1-5).

Thank you for the questions.

I am taking note of the fact that you are not responding to my answers. I wonder why?

Yours in the name of Jesus Christ the Savior,

Jack W. Langford