

## The Cost of the Covenant

“The multitude . . . came forth to be baptized of him.” Luke 3:7

Does the Seventh-day Adventist tradition of requiring believers to accept a string of theoretical and lifestyle changes prior to their baptism (or rebaptism) pass muster? Should we, rather, be prepared to baptize those who confess that they are sinners and that the Lord Jesus died for their sins?

Or must they also strip themselves of earrings, renounce their belief in eternal torment, acknowledge the authority of the Ten Commandments, believe in the end-time manifestation of spiritual gifts, eschew (not chew) pork, and commit to pay tithe?

### The Reasoning of the Essay

The following four paragraphs present the logical flow of the essay unencumbered by the proof of the various assertions. As the evidences cover, at times, more than a page of text, the reader may be benefited by knowing up front just what it is that is being demonstrated.

Baptism represents a submission to the New Covenant. In the New Covenant the old way of life is put to death. It is symbolically buried during baptism. The new way of life is resurrected. One can not *reasonably* submit to any sort of covenant or agreement without a working knowledge of his responsibilities and obligations under that agreement.

In the New Covenant the penitent confesses his violations of the covenant law. He yields his heart to be recreated in true holiness. His baptism indicates his allegiance to the covenant law. God's part of the New Covenant includes writing the covenant law in the heart of His subjects. This is done incrementally as the penitent is brought into greater familiarity with the law itself. He is never asked to give up a habit or an opinion that undermines divine Law until he can be brought to see his error.

Baptism, the symbol of the covenant between God and his people, must logically follow instruction regarding the covenant. God's church is that corporate body that represents His covenant law to the world. Its members are known as those that “keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.” If God's organized people are those that have entered with Him into covenant relation; and if baptism is a symbol of entering the covenant, then baptism can not reasonably be separated from entry into church membership.

Further, baptism must follow instruction in those particular applications of the New Covenant law that distinguish God's people from the world. New Testament data supports this view with sufficient evidence to confirm that men were not baptized until they had surrendered in heart to practical and difficult applications of God's law. Conforming to God's will in these areas was a fruit that was “meet for repentance.”

## Covenant – Baptism

The covenants made by God in the first 2,500 years of earth history are centered around the stories of the flood, the exodus, the cloud-appearances of God, and the rite of circumcision. Each of these is compared to baptism, either by Peter or Paul. See I Peter 3:18-21; I Corinthians 10:1-2; Colossians 2:10-13.

The Jews expected that the Messiah would “confirm the covenant” (Daniel 9) with the chosen nation. Past covenants had always been confirmed by a symbol, whether passive as in Genesis 9:13; 15:17-18, or active as in Acts 7:8. Entering Noah's ark and crossing the divided Red Sea were in the latter camp. I Peter 1:3:18-21; I Corinthians 10:1-2. The role of water in symbolically washing away sin was familiar to all Jews. Exodus 30:17-21; Hebrews 9:10. It was natural for the Jews to connect baptism with washing away of sin and the promised renewing of the covenant. Isaiah 1:16-18.

### ***Requisites for New Testament Baptism***

Of the thirteen baptismal events in the New Testament, all but one give clear evidence that the baptismal candidates, as Jews or Samaritans or worshippers of the true God, were already familiar with the sacrificial system, the Law of God, and the Mosaic health laws. See Appendix A for the supporting scriptural data in the form of graph.

What did John the Baptist's sermons reveal about what he expected of those who presented themselves for baptism?

They had to recognize and publicly renounce their sins. So Matthew recounts that they were baptized of him “confessing their sins.” Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5. Matthew joins other writers in mentioning that they were called to renounce their carnal security, that assurance that rested in their relation to Abraham. Matthew 3:9.

In Matthew and Luke they were to “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8. There were outward reforms that were reasonably expected from those professing to be leaving a life of sin. During a repent-or-face-judgment sermon (Luke 3:7-9, 17) John's listeners asked what those required reforms might be. “What shall we do then?” Luke 3:10.

This was John's opportunity. He could have answered “be baptized.” But John began rather to identify the idols and mistaken notions of the people that prevented them from a full obedience to the covenant law of Ten Commandments.

His injunctions there in Luke 3:11-14 might be summarized: Love your neighbor as yourself, Do not

steal, Do not kill, Do not covet. Each command was delivered to that class that particularly departed from the same. Soldiers, for example, were to do no "violence." Luke 3:14. That was a radical reform to require of military persons. Publicans were to charge only what was their due. Luke 3:13. And this was required despite the fact that the extra charges were the staple of their income.

The people were poor, yet were required to give a great deal of their meager substance to those poorer than themselves. Luke 3:11. And the rich king Herod was required to turn from "all the evils which Herod had done." John's appeal to Herod ended John's public ministry. Luke 3:19.

By this sermon John showed that he would not leave messy and unpleasant work to be done by other instructors after he had baptized his hearers and gone to preach to another audience. Nor would he let political considerations modify his personalized calls to repentance.

When Jesus later testified of John's work, it was this unbending integrity to which He first called attention. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" he queried. "A reed shaken with the wind?" Matthew 11:7; Luke 7:24.

The publicans accepted their high calling to honesty and thus "justified God." Luke 7:29. Their changed lives demonstrated that God's plainness of communication was warranted and wholesome. But Jewish leaders "rejected the counsel of God against themselves." Luke 7:30.

The call of today's church to simplicity in dress and diet matches the model established by the Baptist. Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6. This baptizer himself, not some system following him, brought the issues of dress and diet to the attention of the public. His disciples, those that followed his *teachings*, were characterized as living in the same abstemious way as their master. Mark 2:18.

Immediately after His own baptism by John, Jesus faced a time of intense temptation. Matthew 4:1-10. He overcame those temptations by dependence on God's powerful Word. He modeled victorious living by meeting temptation with scripture.

His struggle is typical of new believers everywhere. They are beset by severe temptations and should be thoroughly grounded in a knowledge of the Bible that would brace them to stand under their post-baptism trials. Compassionate ministers will understand the force of this argument.

### ***Baptismal Requisites in the book of Acts***

The Pentecostal outpouring and its baptismal aftermath are the subject of Acts 2. The requisite for baptism in Acts 2 is "gladly" receiving the many words of "exhortation." Ac 2:40. Exhortation is a teaching regarding how someone ought to live his life. The first call to baptism after the cross involved "many other words" of exhortation, or reformatory teaching. Acts 2:14-41.

Most of the words preached by Peter in Acts 2 and by John in Luke 3 were not recorded. Luke 3:18; Acts 2:40. Yet we are told that there were “many” other words of exhortation preached there. The times and its errors might make yesterday’s exhortations less practical today. But the importance of “many” other words of instruction being preached by baptizing evangelists is highlighted in both mass baptism accounts.

### ***The Baptism of the Samaritans and of the Ethiopian***

What did Philip preach to the Samaritans prior to baptism? The “things concerning the kingdom of God.” These would, naturally, include the “royal law” that forms the basis of judgment in the Kingdom.

Leaving the Samaritans he found a Bible student with great responsibilities striving to understand the words of Isaiah 53. Philip offered to help the man understand the prophecy. The Ethiopian was already a believer, and an earnest one. How many persons do you know that would study a perplexing passage of scripture while riding home in a chariot?

The Ethiopian, after understanding the role of Jesus in the salvation he had sought by obedience to the laws of Moses, was baptized.

The passage is certainly no encouragement to those that would suppose that we may baptize persons knowing little and instruct them more thoroughly in the months following their baptism. The eunuch was, in the judgment of the Spirit of the Lord, ready to go alone into an unentered country and stand there in defense of truth. He saw Philip “no more.” Acts 8:39.

### ***Paul’s Conversion and Baptism, and that of Crispus***

Prior to Paul’s conversion he had an outward righteousness unparalleled by his peers. Galatians 1:14. His knowledge of Old Testament scripture earned him national respect at a young age. Acts 22:3. His conversion and subsequent baptism were followed immediately by a period of preaching. When he committed to give his life to Jesus Ananias could appropriately ask, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16.

Paul’s baptism, and that of the leader of a synagogue, Crispus, both illustrate that where a thorough Biblical knowledge of God and his requirements already exists, a comparatively brief period of instruction in the methods of grace and the truth of the cross is sufficient preparation for baptism.

### ***The Baptism of Cornelius and His Family***

Lest anyone think that the conversion of Cornelius’ home was a sudden affair, pagan today and

baptized tomorrow, we quote Bible statements about the pre-baptism family of Cornelius. He was "a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." Acts 10:1, 2. See v. 4, 22, 30, 31.

Though his spiritual credentials were high, he and his family were not baptized until they were publicly filled with the Holy Spirit. Far from setting a lower standard, this passage, if taken to an extreme, would forbid baptism of gentiles until their lives gave certain evidence that they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### ***The Baptism of Lydia***

Lydia and her household were baptized, apparently in connection with a river-side, prayer-preaching service. We have no record of what was preached, but lest we conclude that Lydia derived her entire knowledge of truth from the afternoon sermon we are told that she "worshipped God" and that her heart had been "opened" by the Lord prior to her hearing of the Apostle.

Her hospitality was bundled with an invitation to the visiting speakers. "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house." They did go to her house. Her speech makes it apparent that she had cultivated more than a casual acquaintance with the apostle. She expected that he knew her well enough to evaluate her faithfulness. How she came to worship God originally we know not, but such practice doubtless came with some instruction in the things of God. Moses had men that preached him in every city. Acts 16:13-15, Acts 15:21.

### ***The Baptism of the Jailor***

Following a miraculous earthquake and a subdued group of prisoners, the guard appointed to keep Paul and Silas "brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Acts 16:30-33.

How did the jailor know he was lost? That there was a salvation to be gained? That the two prisoners could show him the way to life? All of these things point to some past experience. But how could he have had an earlier encounter with Paul's doctrine?

Paul had been preaching publicly in the city for "many days." Acts 16:12. Yet even so, "they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." The sermon was not long, but it was thorough enough to warrant adding the jailor's family to heaven's covenant keeping family.

### ***The Rebaptism of the Ephesians***

In Acts 19 Paul found a group of men who had entered into covenant relation with God by the baptism of repentance. A dozen of these faithful Baptists were living in Ephesus. They confessed that they had never even heard of the “Holy Ghost.” They did not know anything of Christ’s indwelling by the Spirit and of the writing of the Law in the heart by the work of that Spirit.

Paul took the opportunity to fill in what had been lacking in their understanding of salvation and the work of God’s Spirit in the New Covenant. Acts 19:1-4. A more thorough knowledge of what baptism was to mean warranted a second baptism.

**When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:6.**

### ***The Doctrine of Baptism***

The great commission presents teaching as both a pre-baptism and post-baptism activity. “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The content of the teaching is defined as instruction in holy living. It was to be accepted first, and then reviewed often. See I Corinthians 15:1-2, 2 Peter 1:12.

There has always been a danger in the church that baptism would cease to signify entrance to the New Covenant and would degenerate to signifying the honor due to the evangelist. This happened in Corinth and is partly the subject of the introduction to the first epistle to that city. Its tendency was to make the “cross of Christ” “of none effect.” I Corinthians 1:13-17.

What is most interesting in the Apostle John’s narrative regarding baptism is the way Jesus related to the rumors regarding his own baptismal success. He seems to have fled from the notoriety. To seek attention for success in the baptismal pool seems to reflect a spirit quite contrary to that of the Savior and of Paul. John 3:22-4:2.

The “doctrine of baptism” is listed among the doctrines that form the “foundation” “principles” of the kingdom. The rest of these fundamental doctrines, compared to the milk fed to spiritual babes, include “repentance from dead works, faith toward God,” “laying on of hands,” “and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.” Hebrews 6:1-2.

This list provides a model for evaluating which issues ought to be issues for the infant believer. The sanctuary, in its connection with “eternal judgment” and “repentance from dead works” of disobedience to the Law of God, lays a foundation for the rest. Church order is covered as expressed in its ordination services and baptismal events. Another of the basic themes that must be understood was practical faith.

## ***Newness of Life***

**Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:3-4.**

In Ezekiel the promise of a new heart is most pronounced. The new heart of flesh of Ezekiel is the heart on which the Spirit writes in 2 Corinthians 3:3. And the content of the writing is presented in Hebrews 8 and 10.

**For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my *laws* into their mind, and write them in their hearts: Hebrews 8:10. See Hebrews 8:11-12; 10:16-18. *Emphasis supplied.***

The Covenant is fulfilled incrementally. The phrase “And they shall not teach every man his neighbor” (Hebrews 8:11) will not be fulfilled until after the destruction of the wicked. And neither is the law written instantly and subconsciously. Men are brought into contact with the law as a step in their conversion. The law of the Lord is perfectly adapted to change the life as it is inwritten by the Spirit. Psalms 19:7. Men view the law and recognize their failings. If they continue to receive the correction meekly, the work done by the Spirit in their life is able to “save their souls.” James 1:21-25.

This makes the Law central to all evangelistic work. Men’s acquaintance with its claims forms the measure of the extent to which their lives can be made “new.” Men may be reformed in life only where they have chosen to surrender.

## ***Counting the Cost***

Jesus never encouraged men to commit first and consider later. His position was that they ought to “count the cost.” He made them aware of the small print. Did they know that following him meant having no certain home? That they would be hated by all, including their family? Did they realize that they would have to deny their *selves*? That their tempers could not follow them into the kingdom?

“Putting on Christ” (see Galatians 3:27) is no hollow imputation of holiness. In Colossians 3 we find that those who put on Christ put on “bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind.” They are given both a chapter full of graces to be purposefully cultivated and also lists of vices to be abandoned.

Such a radical transformation of life ought not to be accepted without carefully weighing the costs against the benefits. Making the decision superficially sets the committed up for shipwrecking his

faith.

This God would never encourage a man to do.

## **Summary**

God's church on earth has always been that class of persons who have honored his law and submitted to his instruction. The book of Revelation makes it clear that loyalty to the Commandments will figure prominently in the final struggles. God's covenant-keeping people, his church, are there characterized as having the Testimony of Jesus.

Baptism, the symbol of entering into the covenant, has been reserved in the Bible for those that can intelligently accept the terms of the covenant. These terms in the New Testament include a turning away from popular forms of disobedience. They include having a practical knowledge of the work of the Spirit and of the meaning of faith and of the reality of the judgment. They included a practical knowledge of prophecy as it was being fulfilled and was relevant to present truth. They include a significant reform in social grace indicated by the words "put on Christ."

They included a great deal of pieces of instruction not stated but summarized as "many other words." The terms were extensions of the Law as written in stone. Ignorant persons are never baptized in the New Testament. All were invited to count the cost of having the Law written in their mind.

An application of these same principles today would lead church evangelists to instruct candidates regarding their violation of the commands Thou Shalt Not Steal, Thou Shalt Not Kill, Thou Shalt Not Covet, Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery, Thou Shalt Not Have Any God Before Me, Remember the Sabbath to Keep it Holy.

These commands enforce the church's stand on tithe, on healthful living, on fashion and modesty, on the Sabbath.

An application of the same principles would also lead church evangelists to instruct their listeners in regard to current fulfillments of prophecy and the current working of the Holy Spirit in the church through the gift of prophecy. This working and instruction was often connected with baptism in the books of Acts.

Finally, to neglect these practical applications of the New Testament is to remove God's intended meaning from the rite of baptism. This leaves it hollow and prone to the degeneration recorded in I Corinthians. It sets evangelists up to be honored for bringing in members that are themselves set up for apostasy.

## **The Thirteen Events**



A)	The Baptism work of John	28 References	Jews Baptized*
B)	The Baptism work of Jesus	3 References	Jews Baptized
C)	Pentecost	2 References	Jews Baptized
D)	Philip and Samaria	3 References	Samaritans Baptized
E)	Philip and the Ethiopian	2 References	Jew Baptized
F)	Paul's Conversion	2 References	Jew Baptized
G)	Baptism of Cornelius, Family	2 References	"Devout"
H)	Baptism of Lydia, Family	1 Reference	"Worshipped God"
I)	Baptism of the Jailor, Family	1 Reference	
J)	Bap. of Crispus, Corinthians	1 Reference	Jewish Ruler, others*
K)	Baptism of Apollos	1 Reference	Jew Baptized
L)	Rebap. of John's Disciples	2 References	Jews Baptized
M)	Baptism disputes of Corinth	3 References	Corinthians

It appears that the Bible Author intended that we would gather a large share of our information on Biblical baptism from the experience of John the Baptist. Further, it is evident that 41 of the 50 historical references are to baptisms of Jews. Seven others are references to those that were devout or worshipping the true God prior to their exposure to Christianity.

\* The unnamed others probably did included non-Jews (as the soldiers, for example). But as this is not stated, the graph does not show it. There is no reason to suppose that they were ignorant "others." Both John and Paul were first-rate instructors in holy living.

### **The Testimony of Ellen White – Is Missing Here**

This essay has been prepared, partially, to answer the objection of those who suggest a dichotomy between Ellen White's insistence on thorough baptismal preparation and, as they allege, the Bible's contrary minimal requirements for baptism. For two reasons – to show the Bible Testimony as it stands on its own, and to prevent the unwanted expansion of the paper – no compilation is given in this paper.

However, for those who are not aware, Ellen White does certainly speak to the point of this paper. She has written an entire article on the baptismal doctrine and its application in Adventism. Numerous other references in her writings to the topic may be located in a few moments with either the EGW CD ROM or the Comprehensive Index to the Ellen White writings. The seeker will find a treasure of information confirming the long-held position of the church in regard to baptismal preparation.

In the book *Evangelism* the reader will also find, with a brief search, that Mrs. White expected Sunday keeping men convinced and joining the Sabbath keeping body—she expected them to desire rebaptism. This matches the arguments in this paper well, as any man would consider his first baptism sub-quality if it represented a submission to a law he did not even acknowledge as binding or did not at all understand.

Further, in that same book, the reader would find that evangelists ought to do the work of teaching all that the church requires and not to leave that for later workers. The reason given: The converts trust their first teacher and will be suspicious of any who would seem to tighten the chain that they had allowed to be placed on their neck. I have experienced the truthfulness of that paragraph.