

# Landon- Sharp Debate on the The Purpose of Water Baptism

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## **Propositions**

The Scriptures teach that water baptism, to a penitent believer, is for (in order to) the remission of sins.

Affirm: Keith Sharp

Deny: David N. Landon

Water baptism is a New Testament sacrament administered as a sign and seal that the one being baptized is in the covenant of grace.

Affirm: David N. Landon

Deny: Keith Sharp

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## **Affirmative** **Keith Sharp**

It is my pleasure and privilege to engage in this tenth written debate over differences between the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the church of Christ with my respected friend, David Landon. This discussion concerns the purpose of baptism. I affirm: **Water baptism, to a penitent believer, is for (in order to) the remission of sins.**

The meaning of the key word “baptism” will be the subject of a later debate. A “penitent” is one who has turned away from his sins (Romans 2:5; Matthew 12:41; Jonah 3:10). A “believer” has conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and has placed His trust in Him for His salvation (Hebrews 11:1,6; John 20:30-31; Romans 3:21-26). This proposition pertains to alien sinners, those outside Christ (Ephesians 2:11-12), since there are different terms of pardon for an erring child of God (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). The proposition defines the preposition “for” by the phrase “in order to,” referring to purpose, in contrast with “because of.” “Remission”

means “*release.... pardon, cancellation ... forgiveness*” (Arndt & Gingrich. 124; cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19). “Sins” are violations of the law of God (1 John 3:4) and the cause of condemnation before God (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 3:23). The proposition affirms that water baptism is essential to the justification, sanctification, and salvation of alien sinners.

I will not make indirect arguments based on a theological position but will only examine passages that state the purpose of water baptism. This will assure my position is based on the Scriptures rather than prejudice.

#### **Mark 16:16**

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” The Lord divided people into two categories, the saved and the lost. Those who do not believe will be lost. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Christ made baptism as much a condition of salvation as belief. There are only two categories, not three. Jesus knew nothing of unbaptized, saved people. The Lord placed baptism before the initial salvation of the believer rather than afterward. To be saved one must believe in Jesus Christ enough to obey Him in baptism.

#### **John 3:5**

“Jesus answered, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”” (John 3:5). There is one new birth, of water and the Spirit. The Spirit of God leads us by the gospel to be born again (Romans 8:14; 1 Peter 1:22-23). The only element of the gospel with which water is connected is baptism (Acts 8:36-39; 10:47-48). When the Holy Spirit leads us by the gospel to be baptized in water, we are born anew. We must do this to enter the kingdom of God.

#### **Acts 2:38**

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” The apostle Peter assigned baptism the same purpose as repentance. If repentance is unto remission of sins, so is baptism. Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” is “for the remission of sins.” This is the same phrase, both in English and Greek, found in Matthew 26:28, where Jesus declared He would shed His blood “for the remission of sins.” The Son of man shed His blood in order that our sins might be taken away, and we are to be baptized in order that our sins might be taken away.

#### **Acts 22:16**

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Ananias commanded Saul to be baptized and promised his sins would be washed away as the result. The Scriptures put baptism before and essential to the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ.

#### **Romans 6:3-4**

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Baptism brings the sinner into Christ, where he receives “every spiritual blessing” (Ephesians 1:3) including salvation (2 Timothy 2:10), and brings the sinner into the death of Christ, where he receives the benefits of His blood, justification from sin (Romans 5:9-10). By going through a likeness of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thereby demonstrating our faith in Him, we receive the benefits of His death in our behalf. Baptism stands between the sinner and being in Christ (verse 3), being in the death of Christ (verse 4), the new life in Christ (verse 5), being united with Christ (verse 5), being united with the Lord’s crucifixion (verse 6), and freedom from sin (verse 7).

### **Galatians 3:26-27**

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” We become sons of God by faith when we are baptized into Christ. Baptism stands between the sinner and becoming a son of God, getting into Christ, and putting on Christ.

### **Ephesians 5:25-26**

“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Baptism is a “washing of water,” the only “washing of water” taught by the word. Christ cleanses the church by grace (Ephesians 2:8-10) when we are baptized. The power to cleanse is in the word (John 15:3), but it is exercised in baptism. Any baptism not taught by the word is ineffective.

### **Colossians 2:11-13**

“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by 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 faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead, And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

Christ performs an operation without hands upon our hearts when we through faith are buried with Him in baptism. He removes the sins of the flesh from the heart, forgiving us all our trespasses, and we are made alive with Him. Baptism stands between the sinner and having his sins removed, being raised with Christ, being made alive with Him, and being forgiven.

### **Titus 3:5**

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” We do not earn righteousness, but we are saved by the mercy of God. This is accomplished when we are born anew through being washed (in water - John 3:5) and being made anew by the Holy Spirit.

### **Hebrews 10:22**

“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.” When our bodies are washed in water, the blood of Christ is applied to our consciences, cleansing them from sin.

### **1 Peter 3:21**

“There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Baptism saves us, not through removing dirt from the body, but by allowing the conscience to be good toward God. This is not through any power in the water but by the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Protestants contend, “Baptism doth also **NOT** save us.” But the Scriptures teach, “Baptism doth also **NOW** save us” (1 Peter 3:21, **KJV**). Will you accept the creeds of men or the word of God?

### **Summary**

Water baptism stands between the alien sinner and salvation (Mark 16:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21), the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:5), remission of sins (Acts 2:38), having his sins washed away (Acts 22:16), being in Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26-27), the death of Christ (Romans 6:4), new life in Christ (Romans 6:5; Colossians 2:11-12), union with Christ (Ibid), union with the Lord’s crucifixion (Romans 6:6), freedom from sin (Romans 6:7), becoming a son of God (Galatians 3:26-27), putting on Christ (Ibid), sanctification (Ephesians 5:25-26), cleansing (Ibid), removal of sins (Colossians 2:11-12), being raised with Christ (Ibid), forgiveness (Ibid), renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), sprinkling from an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22), and a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21).

**Water baptism, to a penitent believer, is for (in order to) the remission of sins.**

### **Work Cited**

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### **Negative David N. Landon**

Keith’s proposition, as it stands, might have come from our own confession. Baptism (WCF 28,1) “is a sign and seal.. .of remission of sins.” It is to be received by those who “profess

faith in and obedience unto Christ,” (28,4). I admit “baptism” is a key word, as a later debate will reveal.

My first comment about Keith’s affirmative is to point out how clearly it illustrates the importance, in this subject especially above others we have debated, of certain principles of interpretation and approach to Scripture. Never mind Keith’s interpretation of eleven proof texts. Notice his interpretation, in his second paragraph, of the terms of his proposition. By the end of that paragraph he has come up with an entirely new proposition: “water baptism is essential to the justification, sanctification, and salvation of alien sinners.” In one short paragraph we have gone from a proposition that I could almost defend myself, to one that I reject entirely; and all because of Keith’s introduction of a new key word; the word “essential.” Because of the common theme in Keith’s proof texts, the following remarks may be considered a sufficient answer to his entire affirmative:

1. Moving from Keith’s interpretation of his proposition to his examination of eleven proof texts, the first thing I would point out is the loaded way he prefaces these passages. He informs us that he will avoid making “indirect arguments based on a theological position,” but will instead “only examine passages that state the purpose of water baptism.” I don’t think Keith is telling us that he doesn’t have a theological position on baptism. He certainly does. Nor is this debate simply one between creed and Scripture. Does Keith give a biblical defense for his position? So do we. Keith would doubtless dismiss the Westminster Confession of Faith as the mere opinions of men. Yet in the margin of the two chapters that deal with the subject of baptism the WCF cites nine out of eleven of Keith’s proof texts as proof of the Presbyterian position. The fact that we are both looking to the same texts underscores the importance of sound principles of interpretation. Keith, in an essay written in 2000 and entitled Rules of Biblical Interpretation, gives us 22 rules of interpretation. These are very good rules, but they need to be kept, especially when debating an act (baptism) that Keith holds is essential for salvation. Which, incidentally, is the first of his own rules that he breaks. In rule #18, Keith writes “Never use an ambiguous or unclear passage to sustain a position that affects our salvation.” Several of the verses Keith quotes are not as clear as we might like them to be, especially if we are going to hang our salvation upon them. John 3:5 is one of the most controversial texts in Scripture, and good men, including Nicodemus, a “teacher of Israel,” have come to different conclusions on it. Keith makes his interpretation essential to salvation.

2. Keith’s Rule #14 instructs us to interpret a text literally whenever possible, “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.” Rule #21 recognizes that some passages are intended to be taken figuratively. Not everyone in the Church of Christ denomination has been consistent in the application of these principles. Alexander Campbell, who was one of its first debaters, erred at this point. In his 1837 debate with Bishop Purcell, Campbell demonstrated (rightly I believe) that the words in John 6:53 on eating the flesh of the Son of man, and drinking His blood, ought to be taken figuratively. Yet, just six years later, in a debate on baptism with Rev. Nathan Rice, Campbell insisted that similar language be interpreted literally. Such unwillingness to recognize figure in baptismal language continues almost two centuries later. (As recent as the April 2006 edition of Faith and Facts, where a debater is described as having “muddied the water with synecdoche and metonymy.”) Does such discussion muddy the water? Is there synecdoche, metonymy, or hendiadys (Turretin) in Keith’s proof texts? Without question, there are at least

two parts to a sacrament; there is the sign, and there is the thing signified. It is our position that there is a sacramental union between the sign, and the thing signified, in such a way that the sign is often called by the thing signified, and vice versa. The water applied in baptism is one thing. The blood of Christ signified by the water is another thing. When the thing signified is put for the sign, it is called a metonymy of the subject, according to Benjamin Keach, one of the most recognized authorities on types and metaphors in all of Church history. There are many examples of this figure in Scripture. The lamb is called the Lord's Passover (Ex. 12:11) although it was not the Passover itself, but only brought to the people's remembrance that great deliverance. Circumcision is said to be the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:10) when in truth it was only the sign of that covenant. Similarly with the bread in the Lord's supper being called the body of Christ. An unwillingness to consider the evident figure in many of the texts under discussion leads many to attribute more efficacy to the sacraments than is warranted by Scripture. In John 3:5 there is a hendiadys, with the word *and* joining the words water and Spirit thus signifying spiritual cleansing. This idea is especially brought out in 1 Peter 3:21 where baptism is said "*to save us,*" for we are then immediately told that it is not any outward action of water that saves, but the answer of a good conscience towards God. If space permitted, it could be easily demonstrated that each of Keith's proof texts contain figurative language.

3. I am not sure how Keith got the word "essential" from his proposition. Certainly he must know that the word "essential," and also the word "condition" (which Keith uses in his notes on Mark 16:16) are both in need of further explanation. For, as I remarked above, Keith's original proposition is quite in line with our own Confession. We also affirm that baptism is essential. It is essential as an evidence of a good conscience, and of a genuine conversion. Thus the Confession says that it is "a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance," 28,5. The words "essential" and "condition," then, may be used in different senses. Something may be essential either causally, or consequentially. Keith believes that baptism is essential to salvation as a cause; that it precedes salvation in such a way as that without it a man cannot be saved. An example of how a thing may be essential consequentially can be found in Acts 5:32. For several years I was in the Pentecostal movement. Seeing my disappointment in not having the gift of tongues, my brethren would take me to this text. You need to obey more, I was told, and I would receive the gift. But, as Frederick Bruner points out, the structure of that verse shows that our present obedience is proof of our past reception of the Holy Spirit, "whom God hath (past tense) given to them that obey (present tense) him." Obedience, in other words is essential consequentially, as an evidence of God's gracious work. This distinction is not a trifle. To place baptism in the *order of salvation* prior to regeneration and justification is to turn it into a work. It is, as the 16th century Bishop Jewell wrote, "a superstitious, a gross, and a Jewish error." It is especially a Jewish error. It was the constant cry of the Jews, "we are of the circumcision." It is a superstitious error, for, having once posited baptism as a work, it is not long before pains are taken to ensure that the correct ceremonial words are spoken, that water must be applied in the correct mode, and that the recipient correctly perceive *why* he is baptized. A. Campbell writes that sinners must be "intelligently immersed." And thus it is a gross (in the sense of large) error, undermining the entire evangelical nature of salvation. The Confession reads that "The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered," 28,6. God is a free agent, able to save before, at, or after the act of baptism. Keith (on Mark 16:16) writes that "Water baptism stands between the alien sinner and salvation." We had thought that unbelief was the culprit; for this

verse, while it lists baptism as one of the marks of the saved (in the sense given above) lists only unbelief as the cause of damnation. Baptism, then, is necessary (as Turretin tells us) not as a means, but as a command.

We conclude that baptism, to a penitent believer, a sign and a seal of remission of sins, and that to the worthy receiver, not only exhibits, but conveys the grace of salvation.

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  4. Keach, Benjamin, **Preaching From the types and Metaphors of the Bible, 1972**
  5. Brunner, F.D., **A Theology of the Holy Spirit, 1970**
  6. Goode, William, **The Doctrine of the Church of England as to the Effects of Baptism in the Case of Infants, 1853**
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### Response Keith Sharp

I affirm **Water baptism, to a penitent believer, is for (in order to) the remission of sins.** My friend was not coerced into denying this proposition, and the proposition most certainly does **not** harmonize with Presbyterian doctrine. The fact the **Westminster Confession of Faith** contends baptism “is a sign and seal.. .of remission of sins” demonstrates that Presbyterians place baptism **after** the remission of sins. My proposition places baptism before and “**in order to**” forgiveness.

Nor did I pervert the proposition into a new one. The fact water baptism is in order to the remission of sins obviously implies it “is essential to the justification, sanctification, and salvation of alien sinners.”

My theology of the purpose of baptism is based on the scriptures that teach the purpose of baptism, not on scriptures pertaining to another subject. Presbyterians cannot truthfully claim this.

No, we will **not** “Never mind Keith’s interpretation of eleven proof texts.” I submitted eleven separate arguments. The negative’s responsibility is to show the fallacy of each. Since

Dave ignored eight of the eleven, the proposition stands by default.

The **Westminster Confession** states falsehoods concerning baptism, then cites Scriptures without either quoting them or constructing arguments on them. I quoted the full text of eleven passages and constructed arguments on all eleven.

Dave is both critical and complimentary of the article on “Rules of Biblical Interpretation.” I never denied John 3:5 is figurative. The primary figure of the verse is a metaphor, an unstated comparison. Salvation is compared to birth. The passage is sufficiently clear that Presbyterian scholars and the overwhelming consensus of Bible scholars of all ages recognize it refers to water baptism. “By ‘water,’ here, is evidently signified ‘baptism’” (Barnes). Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand the new birth (John 3:10), and He expects us to do so (John 3:3,5).

Dave thinks Alexander Campbell was inconsistent because He taught that “water” is literal in John 3:5 but that “flesh” and “blood” are figurative in John 6:53. Neither Alexander Campbell nor writers in “Faith and Facts” determine what I believe. That’s a primary reason I’m not a member of any denomination, but Dave is. Furthermore, because I contend a word in one verse is literal, whereas the same word or other words in another passage are figurative doesn’t prove inconsistency. Is “water” literal water in John 3:23?

The context determines whether the word is figurative or literal and, if figurative, what figure is employed. Dave should have examined each passage and argument I introduced, proved from the context any figurative usage, and demonstrated its meaning. He didn’t even try on eight verses and failed on the three he attempted.

He contends John 3:5 is “hendiadys.” This is *a figure of speech in which two words connected by a conjunction are used to express a single notion that would normally be expressed by an adjective and a substantive, such as grace and favor instead of gracious favor* (**American Heritage Dictionary**).

If Dave is correct, John 3:5 means “watery spirit,” since “water” comes before “Spirit” in the verse. Of course, Dave wants it to mean “spiritual cleansing,” but even reversing the supposed figure to “spiritual water” doesn’t yield the Calvinistic perversion.

I demonstrated in my negative that the whole idea of sacraments is unscriptural. The Bible never terms baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or any other outward act a “mystery.” Remember, baptism isn’t a sign of salvation, but of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-5).

It is absolutely true that there is no saving power in water and no spiritual significance to the bodily cleansing effected by water (1 Peter 3:21). Rather, water baptism is “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (Ibid, **NASB**) accomplished by the blood of Christ when we are baptized (Hebrews 10:19-22). Friend, which do you believe, “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21, **KJV**) or “baptism doth also now signify our salvation”(Calvinists)?



Does Acts 5:32 teach that obedience follows reception of the Holy Spirit? Not according to Acts 2:38. In Revelation 11:10 we read, “these two prophets tormented (past tense - KS) those who dwell (present tense - KS) on the earth.” It doesn’t mean they were tormented before they dwelt, but the passage identifies who were tormented. Acts 5:32 doesn’t mean we receive the Holy Spirit before we obey but identifies who receives the Holy Spirit.

Demanding strict adherence to the New Testament pattern for baptism is not “a superstitious, a gross, and a Jewish error” but respect for the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 1:13; Colossians 1:13; 2 John verses 9-11).

God is able to save whomever He pleases, but He has only promised salvation to one who “believes and is baptized”(Mark 16:16). In Mark 16:16 the Lord recognizes two categories, not three. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved; those who do not believe will be lost. There is no third category of Protestant imagination, unbaptized, saved believers. Baptism is unalterably coupled to faith and has the same relationship to salvation faith has. The one who lacks the faith to be baptized lacks the faith to be saved.

My friend didn’t even mention the arguments on Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 5:25-26; Colossians 2:11-13; Titus 3:5; and Hebrews 10:22 and failed in his attempts to reply to the explanations of Mark 16:16; John 3:5; and 1 Peter 3:21. My proposition stands unscathed. **Water baptism, to a penitent believer, is for (in order to) the remission of sins.**

### **Conclusion**

You cannot be taught wrong and be baptized right (Romans 6:17-18). You must be baptized for the right purpose, the remission of sins. Any other baptism is spiritually worthless.  
*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

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**Affirmative**  
**David N Landon**

**Water baptism is a New Testament sacrament administered as a sign and seal that the one being baptized is in the covenant of grace...**

According to the above proposition the purpose of baptism is three-fold: it is a sacrament, it is a sign, and it is a seal.

1. **Sacrament...** While there continues to be disagreement between Rome and the Protestant churches on the number of sacraments, most are in agreement that there are at least two, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Although the word sacrament (from the Latin *sacramentum*) is not in Scripture, yet the word mystery ( *mysterion* ) is, and it is from this word that we get the word sacrament. The simplest definition of sacrament is that it is an outward sign and seal of an inward grace. According to James Bannerman, sacraments, and non-sacramental ordinances such as prayer, preaching, and singing are alike in two respects, and differ in two respects. They agree in this, that they are both positive institutions of Christ, and that they are both means of grace to believers. They differ in this, that sacraments are sensible signs, reaching not only to our minds and souls, but to our outward senses as well, and, secondly, sacraments seal to the believer that which is exhibited in the sacrament. According to the Reformers there were three requisites to a Sacrament. First, there must be a mark that can be easily discerned. Secondly, there is a promise of God, which is represented to us by the external sign. And thirdly, there is the precept of God that binds us to the use of these two Sacraments.

It is impossible to understand the purpose of sacraments apart from a consideration of the Covenant of Grace. When Adam fell into sin he rendered himself and his posterity unfit for any kind of works righteousness. God then entered into a new covenant with mankind, given first in the form of a promise in Genesis 3:15, and afterwards enacted and formally instituted with Abraham and his seed, Genesis 17:9-11. The rite of circumcision was given as a sign and seal of this new covenant. The apostle Paul writes concerning Abraham, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised," Romans 4:11. After the Exodus the Passover meal was added to circumcision, and the Israelites were instructed to observe both sacraments throughout their generations. The Lord's supper has replaced Passover, Matthew 26:26-29. Baptism has replaced circumcision, Colossians 2:11,12. "The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the new," **Westminster Confession of Faith**, 27, 5.

2. **Signs...** Baptism is an outward or sensible sign of a spiritual truth. It is, as Augustine put it, a "visible sermon." According to the confession (28,1) baptism signifies the following: First, a believer's ingrafting into Christ, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," Galatians 3:27. Secondly, regeneration, "according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration," Titus 3:5. Thirdly, remission of sins, "be baptized... for the remission of sins," Acts 2:38. Fourth, and finally, baptism signifies the believer's purpose to walk in newness of life, "we are buried with him by baptism into death... even so we also should walk in newness of life," Romans 6:3,4. Baptism, like circumcision before it, signifies the removal of defilement, and purification. There are several verses in the Bible that show a relationship between baptism and the idea of purging or cleansing. In the Old Testament there were *divers baptisms* (see Hebrews 9:10). In every case the intended effect of these baptisms or washings was to purge the recipient from defilement, or to ceremoniously cleanse them. Examples include the investiture of priests, Ex 29:4-6, purification for the day of Atonement, Lev 16:4,24, purification of any who touch a dead body, Num 19:11-22, and cleansing from leprosy,

Lev 14:1-9. This motif of purging or cleansing carries over into the New Testament. Baptism becomes the cleansing ritual of initiation into the new covenant. In Hebrews nine Paul clearly contrasts the ritual cleansings under the Old Covenant with the spiritual cleansing that the blood of Christ provides, 9:13,14. The close relationship between baptism and purifying is seen also in John 3:22-25. The very first baptisms of the disciples of Jesus and John could not help but raise questions in the minds of the Jews about purifying. The Jews knew Isaiah's prophecy "Then will I sprinkle *clean water* upon you, and ye shall be clean," and David's petition in Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean."

Circumcision and baptism were also both ordained by God to be a visible and separating mark distinguishing the people of the Covenant from those "aliens" who were "strangers from the covenants," Ephesians 2:12. Circumcision was clearly a sign that marked those who had it as being identified with Abraham. Paul cites the baptism of the people unto Moses in the sea as the Old Testament example of how this rite sets one apart unto obedience to God, and to God's appointed leader, 1 Corinthians 10:1,2. The baptism formula is significant at this point. We are baptized *into the name* of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Baptism signifies the believer's consecration to the service of God.

**3. Seal...**Baptism is a seal of the Covenant. It is (to use Turretin's phrase) an "efficacious sign." In a mysterious way it actually conveys grace to the "worthy believer." This view of baptism as both sign and seal avoids the errors on either side of this topic; there are large numbers of Christians who consider baptism to be only a sign and nothing more. It is merely symbolic of those spiritual transactions between Christ and the believer. On the opposite extreme are those who see a causal connection between baptism and salvation. The Biblical position represents baptism as an actual means of grace (more than a mere sign) yet a means working mysteriously, and only in reference to the believer. This view is opposed to all theories of efficacy that involve physical causation such as the *ex opere operato* of Romanism; it is opposed also to all theories that make baptism absolutely necessary to salvation. According to the confession, grace and salvation are not "inseparably annexed" unto baptism, WCF 28,5. Rather, "The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs to..." Sec 6. Baptism then, like circumcision before it, does not of itself save those who receive the mark. Paul writes concerning the Jews, that when not mixed with faith and good works, their circumcision was made uncircumcision, Romans 2:25. Similarly, as the confession affirms, baptism does not automatically save. Some, such as Simon (Acts 8) had baptism, but not salvation. Others, such as the thief on the cross, did not have baptism, yet were saved. It is evident, and thus Paul concludes, that true circumcision (and, by implication, baptism) is "that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter," Romans 2:29.

The fact that baptism does not guarantee salvation does not detract from its importance. As a sign and seal it offers, exhibits, and confers grace to the believer. It is a sign to us that we have been placed by the Holy Spirit into the mystical body of Christ and have been made to participate in all His benefits. It engages us to duty unto Christ, as unto our King. According to James Bannerman, baptism does not justify the recipient, but presupposes his justification. "The believer has previously been 'justified by faith without the works of the law,' ere the Sacrament of which he partakes can affix the visible seal to his justification." Justified by faith, the believer

receives the sign of baptism, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet unbaptised ( see Romans 4:11). The believer then, gives himself to Christ in the ordinance of baptism. But, further, Christ also gives Himself to the believer. The spiritual act of the believer in the ordinance writes Bannerman, “is met by the spiritual act of Christ in the ordinance, when in return He gives Himself and His grace to the believer.”

The efficacy of baptism then, as the confession affirms, is not tied to the moment of the ordinance; actual regeneration may come before, at, or a considerable time after the application of water. While this Sacrament is not to be contemned or neglected (WCF 28,5) yet it is faith alone that saves.

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### Negative Keith Sharp

My friend affirms three things concerning the purpose of baptism: it is a sacrament, a sign, and a seal. Since his position rests on human wisdom, the theologies of the Reformers, he is wrong in all three parts.

### Sacrament

Notice carefully, please, that, in his discussion of what a sacrament is, Dave did not cite one passage. There’s a reason. Not only is the word “sacrament” unknown to the Scriptures, the idea signified by the term is unscriptural and antiscritptural. Of course the term “mystery” (Greek, “*musterion*”) is found twenty-seven times in the New Testament. It simply means “*a hidden thing, secret*” (Thayer, 420). God’s plan for human redemption was a mystery (secret) which is now revealed (made known) by the writings of the apostles (Ephesians 3:1-7). The Catholics have seven sacraments, and Protestants recognize two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But the word “mystery” is never applied in the New Testament to any outward act, whether baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or any other. Scripturally, there is no such thing as “an outward sign and seal of an inward grace.” God demands of us obedience to the faith (Romans 1:5; 16:25-27) in order to be saved (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8-9).

The idea of sacraments supports the Catholic notion of an ordained clergy the laity must depend upon for dispensing the sacraments essential to salvation and the Protestant idea of “a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereto” (**Westminster**. 160-1) to administer baptism. The power of the Catholic hierarchy over the laity is maintained by this superstition, and Protestants need to throw away the entire rotten carcass of Romanism rather than keeping its skeleton in their own false idea of sacraments. The Scriptures place no emphasis on who does the baptizing but rather on the heart of the one being baptized. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the

remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul generally left the baptizing to others and did not even bother to reveal to whom he left this task (1 Corinthians 1:14-17).

The doomed edifice of sacraments is built on the sand foundation of total hereditary depravity, which we have already shown to be false.

So is the entire myth of an eternal covenant of grace beginning in Genesis 3:15. The Scriptures never call the promise of the Seed of woman a covenant. And once a covenant is confirmed, “no one annuls or adds to it” (Galatians 3:15). The Lord’s Supper and baptism could no more be added to an imaginary covenant given to Adam than the law of Moses could be added to the Lord’s covenant with Abraham (Galatians 3:15-17).

The Passover was a part of the covenant God made through Moses with Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3; 16:1-6). The Lord’s Supper did not replace the Passover in an imaginary eternal covenant of grace, but the law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17), Who established a New Covenant following His death (Hebrews 9:15-17) to replace the Old Covenant (Hebrews 10:9). The Passover is fulfilled in Christ our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), and the Passover Feast is fulfilled in the Lord’s Supper, which Jesus instituted during this Feast (Luke 22:7-20).

Nor did baptism take the place of circumcision. Circumcision through Abraham was only for males (Genesis 17:10-12). Why do Presbyterians consider infant girls candidates for baptism, if baptism replaced circumcision? If the law could not be added to the Lord’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 3:15-17), neither can baptism. Hebrew circumcision was and New Testament baptism is administered by human hands (Genesis 17:23; Acts 8:38), but the circumcision associated with baptism is “the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”(Colossians 2:11-12). This plainly teaches that, when one is baptized, his sins are remitted (cf. Acts 2:38), just as my proposition affirms.

## Sign

Baptism does not signify “the believer’s purpose to walk in newness of life”; rather, it signifies the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-5). It is a “form (“representation or pattern,” Vine. 2:124) of doctrine”(Romans 6:17-18). The “doctrine” (“teaching,” **NASB**) is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is what baptism signifies or represents. When we obey this form (baptism), we are “set free from sin”(Romans 6:17-18).

Yes, salvation from alien sins is tied to the time when we are baptized. It is how we by faith become children of God and gain entrance into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4) and the means by which He in His mercy saves us (Titus 3:5). It is “for (“to denote purpose, in order to,” Arndt & Gingrich. 228) the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Baptism doesn’t signify “the removal of defilement, and purification,” but is the final condition upon which the Lord purifies us of alien sins (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Undoubtedly the ritual washings of the law foreshadowed New Testament baptism, but, whereas they could only sanctify “for the purifying of the flesh” (Hebrews 9:13), baptism, by bringing to us the benefit of the blood of Christ, cleanses our “conscience from dead works to serve the living God”(Hebrews 10:19-22; 9:14).

Israel was not delivered from slavery to Pharaoh until they were “baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”(1 Corinthians 10:1-2), and we are not delivered from the slavery of sin until we are baptized (Romans 6:3-5,17-18).

## Seal

Though the term “seal” is employed twenty-five times in the New Testament, not once is it used in connection with baptism. This is just more human wisdom, Reformed theology rather than inspired Scripture.

I am not defending the Catholic dogma of baptism as a sacrament conferring salvation apart from faith. “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). We must obey “from the heart”(Romans 6:17-18). The saving power is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but baptism is a condition God has set for alien sinners to receive that saving power (1 Peter 3:21).

Our regeneration begins when we hear the gospel (1 Peter 1:22-23) and culminates when we are baptized (John 3:5; Titus 3:5).

Why deny Simon had salvation?(Acts 8:5-24) He “believed” and “was baptized” just as the other Samaritans (Acts 8:12-13). He did what Jesus declared all must do to be saved (Mark 16:16). My friend’s “impossibility of apostasy” theology demands that Simon wasn’t saved, because, after he believed and was baptized, he sinned, and Peter denounced him, “you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity”(verse 23). Dave needs to stop seeing the Scriptures through his theology and let the Scriptures show him his theology is false.

Presbyterians assume and assert the thief on the cross was not baptized. He was crucified in Judea. When John preached in the wilderness and baptized in Jordan, “all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan” (Mark 1:4-5). Furthermore, Jesus “made and baptized more disciples than John” in the same region (John 4:1-3). The thief knew Jesus was Lord (Luke 23:42). How did He know that if He had not heard John, Jesus, or His disciples preach? Why did he call Jesus “Lord” if he was not a disciple? Are you sure the thief was not baptized? The burden of proof is on the one claiming him as an example of salvation without baptism. Are you willing to risk your soul on it?

We live in the New Testament age (Hebrews 9:13-15). The New Testament did not acquire force until after Jesus died on the cross (Hebrews 9:16-17). The Lord blessed the malefactor with the promise of paradise as they both hung on crosses, before the death of Christ. The conditions of salvation were different at that time. For example, we must believe in the historical facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to be saved (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), but no one could believe these facts before Jesus’ resurrection.

When we are baptized, we are “justified by his grace”(Titus 3:5-7).

Based on Romans 4:11, Dave concludes, “it is faith alone that saves.” Of course, the passage affirms salvation by faith apart from circumcision, and the context affirms salvation by faith without the works of the law of Moses (Romans 3:27-31). Paul never affirms salvation by faith alone, and James condemns the doctrine (James 2:14-26).

## Conclusion

My friend affirms baptism is a sacrament, a sign, and a seal. Scripturally, there is no such thing as a sacrament, he read the sign wrong, and it’s not a seal. Three strikes! He’s out!

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## **Response** **David N. Landon**

Keith begins his negative with the statement that since my “position rests on human wisdom, the theologies of the Reformers,” I am therefore wrong. I could just as easily say that since Keith’s position rests on human wisdom, the theologies of the *Stone-Campbell Tradition*, he too is wrong. I demonstrated in my negative that both the Reformers and the Puritans used the same proof texts that Keith appeals to. Why is it that when the Reformers use these texts it is “human wisdom,” but when Keith uses them it is truth?

Keith and I both appeal to the same texts; it is then, as I pointed out in my negative, a question of interpretation and approach to Scripture. In the Westminster Confession of faith we read that the whole counsel of God “is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (1,6). Truths gathered by necessary consequence are as inspired and true as those expressly set down. The doctrine of the Trinity is a good example. (And, incidentally, the word Trinity, like the word sacrament, is not in Scripture.) Keith’s *Rules of Biblical Interpretation* (see WAB, Dec. 2000) does not recognize the above principle. Keith would have an explicit text for every doctrine. That Baptism and Communion are sacraments is demonstrated from a comparison of several passages. Jesus clearly instituted two memorials, with a command to His followers to keep them until His return, and promised a blessing to those who would observe them. If Keith would rather use the Biblical term *mystery* than the word sacrament I have no objection.

Keith and I are agreed that baptism is a sign; we differ as to *what* it signifies. The Protestant churches generally have taken the position that baptism is a sign of the Spirit’s cleansing and purifying work in regeneration. That baptism is rightly called a seal is demonstrated from its parallel to circumcision. Circumcision, Paul writes, was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith, Romans 4:11. Shall New Covenant believers then, who live under a dispensation of grace far more glorious than that of Moses, be without a seal of that same righteousness?

This debate, as I have pointed out, is largely one of interpretation and approach to Scripture. Nothing shows this more clearly than Keith’s treatment of Simon and the thief on the cross. When I give Simon as an example of one who was baptized and yet not saved, Keith, instead of acknowledging that I have appealed to Scripture, brings up my “impossibility of apostasy” theology. I might as easily show that Keith’s view on Simon is influenced by his “impossibility of perseverance” theology. Scripture clearly teaches that there are two kinds of faith; the genuine that brings forth fruit, and Devil’s faith (James 2:19) that is spurious and temporary. Simon had the spurious kind.

Concerning the thief, Keith claims that the burden of proof is on the one claiming him as

an example of salvation without baptism. How so? Our position is that regeneration is not tied to the moment of the sacrament. We do not make the ordinance essential to salvation. The burden of proof rests on those who would make it essential. And notice how Keith demonstrates the thief's baptism. The thief was crucified in Judea--therefore he must have heard John preaching--therefore he must have heard that Jesus was Lord--therefore he was baptized--and became a disciple?! Keith does not give what he requires, chapter and verse; all is conjecture, assumption, and assertion. What the thief's character was prior to his confrontation with the Son of God is given us in Matt. 27:44, "The Thieves (plural) who were crucified with Him also mocked Him." Some baptism (regeneration) this, that leads one to mock their Lord. Perhaps the thief didn't require baptism. Keith writes that "The conditions of salvation were different at that time." We are required to believe in the historic facts of the death, burial, and resurrection; this sort of faith, claims Keith, was not possible prior to the resurrection. Wasn't it? To say nothing of Abraham, who saw Christ's day and rejoiced (John 8:56), consider the thief. Certainly he knew Christ was going to *die*. Keith has told us that this malefactor was from Judea where it was customary to *bury* the dead. And finally the thief asked Christ to remember him when He came into His Kingdom, certainly an indication that he believed in the imminent *resurrection* of Christ. Surely this felon had greater faith in these things than many who have lived after the resurrection, for he believed these things while he saw Christ being crucified as a criminal.

Keith cannot get over the idea of baptism being a condition. This is the classic "Jewish error," that salvation is tied to the sign. If the sacrament can be said to be a condition at all, it is a condition *sine qua non* (that without which not). The thief was saved by his faith alone. Certainly, had he been permitted to live, his faith was the kind that would have led him to submit to baptism, but regeneration and justification was his already.

"Three strikes! He's out!" This is Keith's conclusion to my negative. Certainly Keith knows that in baseball one can lose an inning (which I do not concede), and yet win the game. And this "game" of baptism debate has gone on for centuries. A great part of the church has used the same language that Keith has in describing baptism (as Campbell demonstrated in his *Christian System*). But compare this language with other writings of these same (for examples see Goode, *Infant Baptism*) and it will be evident that they spoke figuratively. Their focus was always on the sufficiency of faith alone. The result of failing to see this, as William Baker writes, is to give us "a decidedly out-of-balance understanding of salvation which allows baptism to tip the scale over all the other biblical aspects of salvation."

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