

## Cowardly Campbellites

On Monday, October 28, 2002 a full-page Campbellite advertisement appeared in The Dallas Morning News. I was a resident of Dallas, Texas and member of the First Baptist Church of Parker, Texas at that time. Aside from the section entitled “Baptism is Necessary for Salvation,” I had no qualms with any of the biblical commentary that 57 Dallas-area Campbellite groups (not churches) consorted to publish.

The page section with which I had serious disagreement consisted of comments on the usual battery of verses which baptismal regeneration advocates adduce to support their heretical beliefs. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the defining doctrine of “Churches of Christ,” I have transcribed the first paragraph of the newspaper article below. Campbellites, as you will read, hold to a synergistic view of salvation (similar to Arminianism and Roman Catholicism).

“The good news of Scripture is that Jesus, the Lamb of God, shed His blood on the cross to save us from our sins. However, there is something *all must do* [emphasis mine] to contact the blood of Jesus so sins can be forgiven. Each person must respond by obedient faith. The blood of Christ makes the difference for every sincere believer who repents of sins and is baptized into Jesus’ death. The Bible is clear—when faith *includes obedience* [emphasis mine], all sins and failures are washed away in Jesus’ blood. Nothing is more important than *saving your soul* [emphasis mine, notice the implied second person active voice form of the verb “saving”]—receiving God’s forgiveness, starting a new life, claiming God’s promises as your very own.”

When such a bold, public repudiation of God’s Word is made, Christians are obligated to reprove, rebuke, and correct those who are in opposition to the truth and themselves (2 Tim 2:25 & 3:16; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3-4). In obedience to the Lord Jesus, I issued a challenge to the Web master of the Internet site provided ([www.fundamentalquestions.org](http://www.fundamentalquestions.org)) in the newspaper advert. Below, I have cut and pasted the correspondence between me (Tony Hepp), the site master (Jeff?), and a minister of White Rock Church of Christ of Dallas, Texas. I have annotated some of the messages using bracketed red text in order to improve coherency and make needed points along the way. For clarity, each message has been separated by a line like the one immediately below this sentence.

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Date: 10/30/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

Hi,

Would you be interested in a public debate concerning the relationship between baptism and salvation?

Tony R. Hepp  
R&D Engineer  
1600 Metrocrest Drive

Carrollton, TX 75006  
PHN: 972-497-7260  
FAX: 972-497-7878  
tony.hepp@lennoxind.com  
TJBTG

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, October 30, 2002 8:30 PM  
To: Hepp, Tony

Can you give me more details?

-Jeff

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Date: 10/31/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

Currently living in the Dallas area where we have many churches, I think it would be very beneficial for the "professing" church at large to witness a condensed discourse over this matter. I do not at this time know when or where it would take place. First, I wanted to know if you or someone else would be willing to represent your soteriological position in a public exchange. Standard debate format would be employed: opening statements, rebuttals, cross-examination, questions from the audience. Determining the venue should be pretty simple with so many large churches in the metroplex. I'm sure one would be willing to host the occasion without cost.

Where do you live? Could you come here for the debate?

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Thursday, October 31, 2002 10:15 PM  
To: Hepp, Tony

Well, I am not in the Dallas area. I am in California. But I could probably find someone willing to do it in Dallas....

What church or denomination do you belong? And who would be "sponsoring" this debate?

-Jeff

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Date: 11/1/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

Hi Jeff,

I attend a small independent Baptist church. We have no denominational affiliation. This coming Sunday, I will confer with the men of "my" church to see if and when we could host the debate. Our building is small, however, so we may need to think of another location. I'm sure one of the hotels in the area has a large conference room that we could use.

God willing, I'll e-mail you back on Monday. In the mean time, you could try to identify a Church of Christ apologist in my area. Have a nice weekend.

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Friday, November 01, 2002 9:20 PM  
To: Hepp, Tony

I will try and see if I can find one in your area that would be interested. I can't promise anything since I know no one personally in Texas, but maybe someone at my church here, will. How many people are you expecting? What is the size of your small independent baptist church? And do you know yet who would be the person debating from your point of view?

Jeff -

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Date: 11/4/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

I really don't know how many will attend. If I had to guess, I would estimate between 200 and 1000. The church I attend consists of about 90 members.

A lot of the men with whom I spoke on Sunday were very interested in the debate and felt it would certainly be worth the time and effort to organize it. We have two men in mind to represent the historic, biblical doctrine of justification. Either man would do a fine job but I'm not sure who is available.

If you can't locate a CoC person in my area within a week or so, I'll probably just call a few of the large CoC bodies. Take care.

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Tuesday, November 05, 2002 9:33 AM  
To: Hepp, Tony

That might be a good idea because I am not having any luck with anyone who knows someone in Dallas.

I can however, answer any questions here through e-mail....

Is there some particular objection to baptism being a part of God's salvation plan you have that has not been answered on the website?

-Jeff

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Date: 11/5/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

OK.

I do not mean to speak audaciously, but all your answers can and have been refuted. Since I need to be a good steward of my time here at work, I can't obviously address the content of your site right now. Perhaps this evening I will shoot you a few questions pertaining to some of the texts that you employ to support Campbellism.

If I'm able to arrange the debate with a local CoC member, I'll let you know. Maybe you could attend if it fits your schedule. Have a nice day!

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, November 06, 2002 12:54 AM  
To: Hepp, Tony

Care to name a few?

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Date: 11/6/2002  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

Yes. If I spend the time and effort providing the proper interpretations of the texts in question, will you seriously consider them or just dismiss them because they contradict your presupposed theology?

My home e-mail address is tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net. Please use this in the future. [This is the first time that I requested Jeff to begin using my home e-mail address.]

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[To improve the flow of our correspondence, I decided at this point to address Jeff's comments and questions within his e-mails to me. Where I have done this, I have highlighted my words in blue. Note that Jeff failed to send his message to my home e-mail account, as I had asked him to do. I replied to Jeff on 11/7/02.]

From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, November 06, 2002 11:35 PM  
To: Hepp, Tony

I was going to ask you the same thing. Before we start, have you read every page on my site?

No, but I will.

The very reason I created my site was that I committed to following and teaching the Bible and the Bible ONLY. (John 12:48) This means no "theology," as you put it.

No theology would mean no God for, by definition, the word means the message, study, or testament of God. (theos = Greek nominative case noun for God, logos = Greek nominative case noun for message, study, etc.) Let's not play the semantic game.

Have you read the answers to objections to baptism page?  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/Somecommonarguments.htm>

Yes. Some are OK. Some are pathetic.

I get hundreds of emails and most ask or debate questions that are explicitly addressed on the site. To avoid repeating what I have taken great time and effort to explain, I usually just refer to the proper page. Half the time people don't even take the time to read what I wrote. I hope you won't be another one that does that.

And one thing I must ask first is: Do you believe the Scriptures are the infallible Word of God and it is by the Scriptures alone we learn how to become wise for salvation?

Yes and no. The Bible is indeed the infallible word of God. But by it alone, no one can become "wise for salvation". Apart from God the Holy Spirit quickening a man's mind to understand the dead letter, it and he will remain just that - dead. See I Corinthians 2:14. My first response to the errors of Campellism will further expound this point.

Jeff

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Date: 11/7/2002 around 4:30 p.m.  
From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff

Hi Jeff,

The first text to which I would like for you to consider (or reconsider) is one that is often used by Campbellites to purport their erroneous doctrine of salvation. John 3:1-8.

I have chosen this text not so much that I may respond to one of your prooftexts but to highlight what causes our differences. I am a monergist. You are a synergist. In essence, your view of salvation is no different than that espoused by Roman Catholics, Mormons, JW's, Muslims, and every other works-based religion in the world. You believe that you must do something to get to heaven, to wit: believe, repent, confess Jesus, be baptized in water, and then "remain faithful for the rest of our lives and carry our cross daily". Your method for gaining entrance into God's kingdom is identical to that of the Jews - you must obey the law of God. (Whether the 'law' is O.T. or N.T. is irrelevant.) You must "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Biblical Christianity is a religion of "done" while yours is a religion of "do". This is apparent in the title of one of your pages - "What must I do to be saved." Sad. Your cult offers no hope to anyone for no one has ever done enough or "remained faithful" enough to be saved. Please do not take personal offense to my use of the word cult. If you use the term in its purest sense, you should label my church as a cult as well.

You are a synergist because you teach that people must add to the grace of God in Christ. Again, people must add their faith, repentance, confession, baptism, etc. to merit heaven. The Bible doesn't teach this. Much to my dismay, many modern-day Baptist churches teach a salvation plan similar to yours. In what state must a man be to get to heaven? Perfect. Matthew 5:48. I Peter 1:16. To commune with a thrice holy God, one must be perfect. What makes a man perfect? The imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. II Corinthians 5:21. By what means does God impute the righteousness of Christ to a sinner? Faith. Galatians 3:5-6. From where does the sinner's faith come? Ephesians 2:8-9. It is a gift from God alone. Man does not have the inherent goodness to perform any truly righteous deeds, especially the exercise of faith! As you and other Campbellites have rightly pointed out, true faith is indeed a work of righteousness. See John 6:29. Most professed Christians today teach that you must believe in Jesus and are then thereby born again from above. Wrong. Saving faith is the result of being born again from above as is repentance, confession, baptism, striving to be faithful, corporately worshipping God, praying, Bible reading, fasting, tithing, etc. Salvation is of the Lord. Jonah 2:9. Both the grace to believe and the faith itself comprise the gift of God. See again Ephesians 2:8-9. The Greek construction of the text forces the neuter pronoun antecedent, that, to refer to both grace and faith (feminine nouns) as the 'gift'. Neither the faith nor the grace is "of ourselves". It is "of God". Why has God done this? So that He gets all the glory (and "that no one should boast") in salvation and the formerly dead (Ephesians 2:1-3), thoroughly wicked (Jeremiah 17:9, Psalm 51:5, Isaiah 1:5-6, Romans 3:10-18), God-hating sinners (Romans 8:7) get none!

I am a monergist. Salvation is all of grace hence the Pauline teaching in Ephesians 1:6 - "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." You teach that man must cooperate with God to be saved. The Bible teaches that no man is able to cooperate with God until he is saved. Read Jesus' words in John 6. "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." The salvation of men and women is not contingent. It is certain. When Christ died on the cross, He actually accomplished something...then. "He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained (first aorist middle participle - point in time act) eternal redemption." See Hebrews 9. I could write to the point that your server would crash when the e-mail hit it but I'll move on to the text at hand.

So what then does John 3 teach? Regeneration or the new birth as it is commonly called must occur before one can even "see" the kingdom of God, namely salvation in Jesus. You probably agree with this fact. But how is one born again? Is it by acts that he or she does? No. This again would be synergism. Notice Jesus does not state an imperative to Nicodemus, "Be born again." Rather, Jesus says, "You must be born again." A baby is brought into the natural world by two parents. Does the baby have anything to do with being born? Of course not. We don't even know it is happening. We can't even remember it happening. Similar is spiritual birth or being "born again". We, in effect have nothing to do with it. It is a sovereign act of God. Verse 8 - "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do now know from where it comes and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." How is the new birth brought about by God? Two valid interpretations may be offered.

By the word of God symbolized by the use of the word 'water' and the Spirit of God. Two parents are required for physical birth. Likewise, two 'parents' (i.e., the word of God and the Spirit of God) bring about spiritual birth. Interpreting 'water' to mean the word of God requires me to use the word of God to support that suggested metaphor.

James 1:18 - "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth...."

1 Peter 1:23 - "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God."

John 15:3 - "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."

Ephesians 5:25 & 26 - "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." Paul again uses the idea of washing to convey the concept of the new birth in Titus 3:5. "...he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Who regenerates and who renews a dead sinner? Only God the Holy Spirit. He alone makes effectual the preaching of His word.

Or 'water' in verse 5 may be interpreted as the sac of water within which a baby lives until birth. The context of our text lends a lot of support for this interpretation. The terms 'water' and 'the Spirit' in verse five parallel 'flesh' and 'Spirit' in verse six. Natural (unregenerate) man is born of flesh having been born of "water" only. Spiritual (regenerate) man is he who has been "born of the Spirit."

I believe both interpretations are true. Please do not start thinking about your other proof texts. Think about this text in its context.

God is the determiner of who is born again and thus saved and who is not. If being born again were up to man, no one would ever be born again because no one would ever seek to be born again because, as Paul plainly put it, no one is a God seeker. Read again Romans 3:11. Salvation does not "depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Romans 9:16. Everyone loves to quote John 1:12 because this puffs up their pride

in thinking they had something to do with their salvation. If we read on to the next verse, however, we see a foreshadowing of John 3 in that the Apostle says that those who received Jesus (vs. 12) did so because of the regenerating power of God. The receiver is "not born of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

Don't think that you must reply immediately. In fact, I hope you think about what I've written for a time before you respond. I will do the same once I receive your reply. Time for dinner now. Take care.

Tony R. Hepp  
972-497-7260 (work)  
972-497-7878 (fax)

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee." Psalm 63:3

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Thursday, November 07, 2002 11:05 PM  
To: Hepp, Tony

I might have someone for you for a debate. I have a name and number. He is in San Antonio. I have to get ahold of him and ask him if he is interested and willing to travel to Dallas. Will keep you posted.

Jeff

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Date: 11/8/2002  
From: Jeff  
To: Tony Hepp

Did you see this page?  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/Baptismisa.htm>

or  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/Grace.htm>

or  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/BloodofChrist.htm>

or  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/waterandspirit.htm>

or  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/TheGospel.htm>

or

<http://www.bebaptized.org/Mark16.htm>

?

And don't worry. I am not offended by your use of the word "cult" anymore than you are offended by my use of the word "heretical" to describe your church. As I am not offended by your words, I expect you will not be offended by mine.

Jeff

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[Although Jeff mentioned a possible debater from San Antonio, I received a message from a member of the White Rock Church of Christ on 11/9/02. David Tarbet is the man's name. My correspondence with him begins at this point.]

From: David Tarbet [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org]  
Sent: Friday, November 08, 2002 8:39 PM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net  
Cc: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Subject: Debate on Baptism

Tony:

I have received word from a brother in California that ou [sic] would be interested in having a public debate on the topic of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I assume your interest was stirred because of the recent full page ad sponsored by churches of Christ in the Dallas Morning News and Fort Worth Star Telegram. Please let me know what you have in mind.

David Tarbet  
White Rock Church of Christ  
9220 Ferguson Road  
Dallas, TX 75228  
Tel: 214-328-2747 (church)  
214-324-8978 (home)

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From: "T. Rocco Hepp" <tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net>  
Date: Sat, 9 Nov 2002 10:59:07 -0600

Hi David,

You are correct in that my desire to hold a public debate over the biblical doctrine of soteriology was heightened by the recent article that appeared in the major DFW newspapers. As I told Jeff via e-mail, I think it would be very beneficial for the "professing" church at large to witness a condensed discourse over this matter. I do not at this time know when or where it would take place. First, I wanted to know if someone would be willing to represent Campellism in a public exchange. Standard debate format would be employed: opening statements, rebuttals, cross-

examination, questions from the audience. Determining the venue should be pretty simple with so many large churches in the metroplex. I'm sure one would be willing to host the occasion without cost.

Look forward to hearing from you soon.

Tony R. Hepp  
972-497-7260 (work)  
972-497-7878 (fax)

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee." Psalm 63:3

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From: David Tarbet [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org]  
Sent: Saturday, November 09, 2002 7:35 PM  
To: T. Rocco Hepp  
Cc: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Subject: RE: Debate on Baptism

Tony:

Normally religious discussions such as this are held on two consecutive nights, the first night in the church building of one disputant and the second night in the church building of the other disputant. Each disputant has 2 30 minutes speeches. The person taking the affirmative speaks first, followed by the person in the rebuttal. This order is reversed for the second speeches. On the second night, the propositions are reworded so that the disputant who took the affirmative the first night will be in the rebuttal position on the second night. Again, the person taking the affirmative speaks first, followed by the person in the rebuttal, and the order is reversed for the second speeches. I have attended a number of religious debates, some between members of the Churches of Christ and the Baptist Church on the subject of baptism, and this is the way they have been conducted.

Each disputant has one (or two) moderators who sit with him on the platform. They do not enter into the public discussion at any time. The audience does not enter into the discussion.

The propositions need to be worded clearly and definitively, in such a way as to get to the crux of the differences being discussed.

The White Rock Church of Christ building will seat 800. What is the size of your church facilities? How many members are there in your congregation? Where is your congregation located?

What are your credentials for entering into this discussion? [You gotta love questions like this.] Have you written anything on the subject which I may read?

There are several other matters which we need to work out between us as we proceed with plans for a religious debate, but we can discuss these soon.

By the way, members of the Church of Christ do not like to be referred to as "Campbellites." I hope your reference to this in your previous correspondence does not indicate that you desire to conduct a mean spirited debate, or one which in any way reflects anything other than a spirit of godly search for the truth.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

David Tarbet

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Tuesday, November 19, 2002 9:23 AM  
To: Hepp, Tony

Any news on the debate?

-Jeff

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From: Hepp, Tony  
Sent: Tuesday, November 19, 2002 10:39 AM  
To: baptism\_1@lycos.com

The minister from White Rock CoC hasn't responded to an e-mail that I sent to him several days ago. Not sure why. Is he scared?

Your reply to my exposition of John 3 was sad. I'll not bother to write in the future if you don't actually deal with the text in its context.

And please, as I've already requested, use my home e-mail account for future correspondence.  
tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net

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TJBTG

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, November 20, 2002 1:09 AM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net  
Cc: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net

I did deal with the text. You just do not believe it. [Wow! What an powerful rejoinder.]

My reply was on the same level as you. If you want to dish it out, you must be willing to take it as well. Fair is fair. I have have no problem being called a cult if you have no problem being called heretical. If that is objectionable to you I will not use my terminology if you will kindly refrain from using yours. But I am very thick skinned so being called a cult is perhaps easier for me to bear than it is for you. I do not know. I am only guessing. Perhaps the tongue-in-cheek tone of this gets lost over internet email.

But on another note, the minister from the church of Christ you mentioned is waiting to hear back from you. He mentioned to me he wanted to hear from you , tried to contact you and had not heard back. I would suggest you give him a phone call instead of using email. I will let him know you are still interested.

-Jeff

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From: Tony Hepp  
Sent: Wed, 20 Nov 2002 21:48:45  
To: Jeff

And how exactly did you deal with the text at hand?

Much of the content within the web pages to which you refer me is simply amazing. If I didn't know I was being asked to read a CC page, I could easily mistake it for a rebuttal from the Roman Catholic Church.

Where do I begin? A few comments: You're treatment of James 2 pits the Apostle James against the Apostle Paul. How do you reconcile Ephesians 2:8-10 with James 2? Like the Pope and his devotees, you and other Campbellites meld/confuse justification and sanctification, both of which are acts of God. Romans 8:28ff, Phil. 1:6, 2:13. It appears that you speak out of both sides of your mouth. Are we justified by works or not? I agree with you that only God works "righteous works" but I reject the idea that He uses "works" to justify us. The shed blood of Christ is the only basis of our righteousness, thus justification before God. See Revelation 5:9. The Christian's righteousness is procured and granted on the basis of Jesus' blood alone. See Hebrews 10:19-22. And contrary to your imposing water baptism on the term in I Corinthians 12:13, it is by spiritual baptism that we are made partakers of Christ's body. Apart from the Holy Spirit taking up residence in a person, he or she has not become a Christian. See Romans 8:9.

How righteousness is imputed to men and women is where we disagree. Faith is simply the first fruit that a believer yields in demonstrating that righteousness has been imputed. How salvation is manifested in our lives is, by what you believe, justifies us, to wit: baptism, remaining faithful (thoroughly Catholic), etc.

Your misunderstanding of the New Covenant runs so deeply. This is exemplified by your handling of the "thief on the cross". Do you agree that Abraham lived under the Old Covenant economy? And how was he justified? See Galatians 3, especially verse 6. Just like Abraham and every other true Israelite (see Romans 2:28-29), the thief on the cross was justified by faith. If you posit that God has ordained two ways to be saved, you evidence that you don't understand anything about the eternal redemption procured by Christ. I hope this is not the case. If so, we should spend some time corresponding about Hebrews.

What was the purpose of the Old Covenant and the Law? Please explain. In short, it was to show men that they could not get to God by the "works of the law". Your doctrine of salvation simply abrogates the New Covenant by trying to maintain the old. Sad. You completely miss the point of Jesus' work on the cross, i.e., the shedding of His blood. See Hebrews 9.

On somewhat of a side-note, your stating that infants are "innocent" is breathtaking. I must honestly ask if you've ever read any of the Old Testament? And please do not respond with an assertion that the nature of man has changed. One of the most explicit passages in the New Testament that is used to describe the nature of man is an OT text. Please read Psalm 51:5 & 58:3 to see that people are not born "innocent". All are born vile, depraved, and totally wicked. If babies are truly "innocent", then why do they die? See Romans 5:12-19.

Two more questions for you before I hit the hay. How do you understand I Corinthians 1:17 and Romans 1:16 in light of what you believe? If Jesus was so concerned about the salvation of His sheep, why didn't He baptize anyone?

When I get a little more time, I'll respond to Paul's conversion recorded in the book of Acts.

Tony R. Hepp  
972-497-7260 (work)  
972-497-7878 (fax)

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee." Psalm 63:3  
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[Again, I replied to Mr. Tarbet within the body of his message to me. See below.]

From: David Tarbet [dtarbet@swbell.net]  
Sent: Wednesday, November 20, 2002 8:33 AM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net; dtarbet@swbell.net; Baptism b

Tony:

The last e-mail from you indicated that your church had not made a commitment to sponsor the debate. Has this been resolved?

No. I'll send out an e-mail tonight to get the thoughts of the leaders. Sorry things are taking so long. Recently, the church has had to deal with some weighty matters so the debate isn't a big priority, at this time, to many of them.

Also, you indicated that you yourself would probably not do the debating. Do you have the name of the person who would represent the Baptist church?

I will ask Bob Ross or James White to represent our position. In my last e-mail to you, I asked if you would represent the CC view. Will you?

We are anxious to hear from you, and have been waiting for you to get back to us. I will try to get back with you soon. Take care.

David Tarbet

[Between 11/10/02 and 11/20/02, the men of the FBC of Parker, Texas deliberated and prayed about "sponsoring" the debate. I admit that we (FBC of Parker) were slow in making our decision.]

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From: David Tarbet [dtarbet@swbell.net]  
Sent: Thursday, November 21, 2002 5:58 PM  
To: T. Rocco Hepp  
Cc: Baptism b

Tony:

Thank you for writing. The two names you mentioned are not recognized by me. Can you tell me a little about them? Have they written anything on the topics to be debated?

The elders of the White Rock congregation are encouraging me to represent what we believe the Bible teaches concerning baptism. I have not made a decision about that yet; there are a number of individuals with more experience whom we may invite to speak on our behalf.

David

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Thursday, November 21, 2002 11:45 PM  
To: T. Rocco Hepp

There is no contradiction between Paul and James. <http://www.bebaptized.org/Baptismisa.htm>

The following sections of the website should answer all the questions you raised in your last email:

Romans 10 is dealt with here: <http://www.bebaptized.org/Important.htm>

"Original sin" is dealt with here: <http://www.bebaptized.org/ButIwasbaptizedasaninfant.htm>  
and here: Ps 51 & 58 are dealt with here: <http://www.bible.ca/r-7-myths-of-denominationalism.htm#c7>

Questions for you to answer: <http://www.bebaptized.org/OSquestions.htm>

The period of the patriarchs was before Moses, before the Law was given. We are under the NEW Covenant now.

Thief on the cross: <http://www.bebaptized.org/BaptismThethief.htm>

Blood of Christ and Hebrews 10: <http://www.bebaptized.org/BloodofChrist.htm>

Saved by grace-God's salvation plan: <http://www.bebaptized.org/Grace.htm>

Saved by faith alone: <http://www.bebaptized.org/Baptismisa.htm>

Paul's conversion: <http://www.bebaptized.org/Acts22.htm>

John 3: <http://www.bebaptized.org/John3.htm>

The Gospel: <http://www.bebaptized.org/TheGospel.htm>

BORN OF [ WATER AND SPIRIT ] , SALVATION, AND BAPTISM:  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/waterandspirit.htm>

Baptism for the forgiveness of sins <http://www.bebaptized.org/Forgiveness.htm>

Prepare the way: <http://www.bebaptized.org/Repentance.htm>

the resurrection: <http://www.bebaptized.org/TheResurrection.htm>

The power of darkness, the kingdom of light, and baptism  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/Darklight.htm>

CONVERSION STORIES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS (they all contain the element of baptism):  
<http://www.bebaptized.org/CONVERSIONSTORIES.htm>

<http://www.bebaptized.org/Baptismis.htm>

There is ONE baptism (and it's in WATER): <http://www.bebaptized.org/Ephesians4.htm>

Other pages: Spirit Baptism Saves Us, Not Water Baptism!

[http://www.bible.ca/eo/ba/ba\\_09.htm](http://www.bible.ca/eo/ba/ba_09.htm)

<http://www.biblelessons.com/spirbapt.html>

I think that should cover all the issues you raised. Let me know if I missed any.

-Jeff

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, January 01, 2003 4:57 PM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net  
Subject: Debate in Dallas?

Is the debate dead or are you still interested?

-Jeff

---

From: T. Rocco Hepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Wednesday, January 01, 2003 9:30 PM  
To: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Subject: RE: Debate in Dallas?

I'm still very interested, but I haven't heard back from David since I told him who would represent the historic doctrine of salvation. I asked him on 12/7/02 if he had received my 11/27/02 e-mail. No word yet.

[I was regretfully unable to find my 11/27/02 or 12/7/02 letters to David Tarbet.]

As for the men of the church that I attend, they're unsure if we should invest the time and money into orchestrating the debate. Some feel there are 'hotter' topics to debate such as dispensationalism or Calvinism/Arminianism. I maintain that the debate we'd like to see transpire is not about baptism; it's about justification so it, in essence, is closely related to the long-running Calvinism/Arminianism debate.

As soon as I hear from David, I'll let you know something.

Tony R. Hepp  
972-497-7260 (work)  
972-497-7878 (fax)

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. I Corinthians 1:17

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From: Baptism b [baptism\_1@lycos.com]  
Sent: Friday, January 03, 2003 12:55 AM  
To: T. Rocco Hepp  
Subject: RE: Debate in Dallas?

Why don't you e-mail him again. He is still interested.

-Jeff

---

From: T. Rocco Hepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Saturday, January 04, 2003 6:59 PM  
To: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Subject: FW: Debate in Dallas?

Hi David,

Please see below.

-----Original Message-----

From: Baptism b [baptism\_1@lycos.com]  
Sent: Thursday, January 02, 2003 11:55 PM  
To: T. Rocco Hepp  
Subject: RE: Debate in Dallas?

Why don't you e-mail him again. He is still interested.

-Jeff

-----

On Wed, 1 Jan 2003 20:29:45

T. Rocco Hepp wrote:

I'm still very interested but I haven't heard back from David since I told him who would represent the historic doctrine of salvation. I asked him on 12/7/02 if he had received my 11/27/02 e-mail. No word yet.

As for the men of the church that I attend, they're unsure if we should invest the time and money into orchestrating the debate. Some feel there are 'hotter' topics to debate such as dispensationalism or Calvinism/Arminianism. I maintain that the debate we'd like to see transpire is not about baptism; it's about justification so it, in essence, is closely related to the long-running Calvinism/Arminianism debate.

As soon as I hear from David, I'll let you know something.

Tony R. Hepp  
972-497-7260 (work)  
972-497-7878 (fax)

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. I Corinthians 1:17

-----Original Message-----

From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Wednesday, January 01, 2003 4:57 PM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net  
Subject: Debate in Dallas?

Is the debate dead or are you still interested?

-Jeff

-----  
Since I had not heard from David Tarbet since my January 4, 2003 letter to him, I decided to write the following letter to him. Note that I copied Jeff.

From: tonyhepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Sunday, February 23, 2003 7:50 PM  
To: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Cc: Jeff

Dear David,

I'm assuming that you are no longer interested in publicly defending the CC doctrine of baptismal regeneration. If so, I shall understand your unwillingness to engage in an exchange as a sign of your inability to biblically support what you and many other CC members purport.

In Christ alone,

Tony

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."  
I Cor. 1:17-18

-----  
[David is correct in stating below that I had not told him whether or not the FBC of Parker, Texas would be willing to sponsor/endorse the debate. After telling him who would be representing the biblical doctrine of salvation, I simply waited to write him again until I received his thoughts on Mr. Ross and Mr. White. I got a chuckle from his last paragraph of this message. Note the e-mail address (which I have highlighted above) that I have been using to send my letters to David—the same address as the one he mentions below!]

From: David Tarbet [dtarbet@swbell.net]  
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2003 9:47 PM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net

Cc: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Subject: Will the Baptist Church Endorse

Tony:

We have been waiting to hear if your church is going to officially sponsor the debate. They will need to cover all of the expenses involved inviting and hosting the person who will represent the Baptist position. They will also need to cover their share of the costs involved in renting a facility, newspaper ads, and other necessary items. All of these expenses will need to be taken care of without a contribution being taken at the debate. We do not want the debate to be a fund raiser for either side. When you get your own church committed to the debate, please let us know, and we will proceed from there.

Please understand that the hold up is not members of the Church of Christ, but a lack of commitment from your own leaders in the Baptist Church. It's up to you to do what we asked you to do from the very beginning.

I am forwarding a copy of this to Jeff in California. In the future, please contact me at my Dallas e-mail address, as it is inconvenient for Jeff to be forwarding messages to me from California. My address is: [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org](mailto:davidtarbet@wrchurch.org).

Sincerely,

David Tarbet  
White Rock Church of Christ  
Dallas, TX

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[I hoped the subject line content of the following letter to David Tarbet would awaken him.]

From: tonyhepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Monday, February 24, 2003 11:45 PM  
To: David Tarbet; David Tarbet  
Cc: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Subject: Will David Read His E-mails

David,

As I said in my 11/27/02 and 12/7/02 e-mails to you, I needed to know if you would still be willing to participate in a debate, having been informed of the name and background of the individual who would represent the biblical doctrine of grace/salvation, before we (FBC-Parker) would move forward with any planning. **Why didn't you reply to the past two e-mails that I sent to you?**

The last three e-mails were sent to [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org](mailto:davidtarbet@wrchurch.org). I'm not sure, therefore, why you're asking me to use this address since I have used it "from the beginning".

I will forward your e-mail below to my pastor and a few men in the church that I attend. When I hear from them, I'll let you know their thoughts. In the mean time, let us know who will represent the CC position. Thanks.

Tony Hepp  
972-497-7260

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[Things start to get a little weird at this point. He now tells me that he/the CoC "church" will not pursue or "invite" anyone to represent Campbellism until I receive a written commitment from FBC's debater. Sounds to me like they were having a hard time locating a representative for their team. Notice he does not explain his failure to reply to my 11/27/02 and 12/7/02 e-mails to him.]

From: David Tarbet [dtarbet@swbell.net]  
Sent: Tuesday, February 25, 2003 9:30 AM  
To: tonyhepp  
Cc: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Subject: Re: Will David Read His E-mails

Tony:

Although we did not initiate the invitation to debate, we will not refuse to defend what we believe the scriptures teach. You have mentioned a couple of individuals whom you think would be willing to defend the Baptist teaching. Do you have a written commitment from either of them? We have not made a decision as to who would represent us in such a religious discussion, and probably we will not invite anyone to do so until we know if the church of which you are a member will meet the conditions already mentioned, and if, indeed, you have secured a written commitment from a qualified person to represent your church. The wording of the propositions will need to be acceptable to both sides also.

David Tarbet

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From: Tony Hepp (tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net)  
To: David Tarbet  
Sent: 2/25/2003 @ 2:15 PM

David,

Will you please answer the question that I posed in my last e-mail to you? [The question to which I was referring was, "Why didn't you reply to the past two e-mails that I sent to you?"]

Tony

---

From: David Tarbet  
To: Tony Hepp (tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net)  
Sent: 2/25/2003 @ 5:14 PM

Tony:

I thought I had responded to the issues you raised concerning the proposed debate.

David Tarbet  
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From: Tony Hepp (tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net)  
To: David Tarbet  
Sent: 2/25/2003 9:15 PM

David,

The question was/is: "Why didn't you reply to the past two e-mails that I sent to you?"

Tony  
-----

From: David Tarbet  
To: Tony Hepp (tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net)  
Sent: 2/25/2003 @ 11:33 PM

Tony:

I receive many, many e-mails in a day. Actually, I thought I had responded to each your letters, but I guess I must have messed up somehow. Please accept my apologies. There was no intent on my part to ignore you.

David Tarbet  
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[In order to appease Mr. Tarbet, I contacted Bob Ross on March 13, 2003. My initial letter to him is pasted below.]

From: tonyhepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2003 10:38 PM  
To: Bob Ross (pilgrimpub@aol.com)  
Subject: I Peter 3:15

Dear Mr. Ross,

I hope this letter finds you growing in the grace and knowledge of our awesome Master and Savior, Jesus Christ. Two dear brothers, Dr. Hal Brunson (my pastor) and Don Eppler (my friend and West End District evangelism partner), recommended that I solicit your assistance with a great evangelism/apologetics opportunity that is now at hand.

Several weeks ago, a full page advert appeared in the Dallas Morning News. It was purchased by most, if not all, of the Church of Christ "churches" in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex. Their message was succinct and clear - water baptism is necessary for the salvation of the soul. Being one who is incensed by doctrinal error of any sort, I wrote the owner of the web site that was listed at the bottom of the newspaper page. My initial e-mail to the site owner was quite brief - "Will you consider a public debate over the relationship between water baptism and salvation?" The web page owner lives in CA so he forwarded my challenge to the White Rock Church of Christ in Dallas. A minister there by the name of David Tarbet accepted my challenge to debate. David informed me that he probably wouldn't represent the CoC position but he assured me that he could find someone who would do the job well.

For the past several weeks, the men of the church that I attend (First Baptist Church of Parker, TX) have been praying about co-sponsoring the debate. We now think that it is God's will for us to help organize and participate in the debate. As I'm sure you know, the CoC's heretical doctrine of baptismal regeneration is simply a byproduct of a more serious misunderstanding of the biblical concepts of man's depravity and the supernatural power of God's sovereign grace. I truly believe the debate would provide a venue for many to hear about the glorious truth of justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

Will you consider representing the true gospel of God's grace in a public debate against a CoC apologist? Having read about your expertise in debunking Campbellites, I feel you would do a fine job in "giving an answer" to those who are deceived and are deceiving many others. Feel free to call me at work if you want to discuss my request. E-mail is great too. I check it every day.

Resting in Jesus,

Tony Rocco Hepp

972-497-7260 (work)

214-929-1502 (mobile)

"Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee." Psalm 63:3

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From: Pilgrimpub@aol.com [Pilgrimpub@aol.com]

Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2003 12:42 AM

To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net

Subject: Re: I Peter 3:15

Dear Brother:

This is interesting. If you could call me and talk more about it, it would be of help to me in evaluating the prospects of a debate. It is better to call in the evening hours so I can talk with the usual daytime distractions here at the store.

-- Bob L. Ross

[For Mr. Ross' privacy, I have deleted the phone numbers that he provided.]

---

[After speaking with Mr. Ross at length about the debate, he heartily agreed to represent the biblical relationship between baptism and salvation. The men of FBC-Parker agreed to sponsor/endorse the debate once they heard Mr. Ross would represent us. Upon receiving commitment from the FBC congregation, I immediately wrote Mr. Tarbet the following letter.]

From: tonyhepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2003 9:45 PM  
To: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Cc: Jeff

Hi David,

The First Baptist Church of Parker, TX will sponsor Bob Ross to defend what we believe the Bible clearly teaches regarding the relationship between water baptism and salvation. Bob's commitment to debate one of your representatives is contingent upon the wording of the proposition and the debate location. I'm sure that you and I can work out both of the aforementioned items without any problems.

Next step - who will argue for the CoC position? Let me know ASAP so that I can relay his name to Mr. Ross.

Look forward to hearing from you soon.

Tony Rocco Hepp

972-497-7260 (work)

214-929-1502 (mobile)

“Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise Thee.” Psalm 63:3

---

[Ten days later, I wrote Mr. Tarbet and Jeff again since I had not received a reply to the above letter.]

From: Tony Hepp  
To: David Tarbet  
Cc: Jeff  
Sent: Sun, 23 Mar 2003 21:07:24

Gentlemen,

Did you receive my e-mail below? The ball is in your court. Please let me know if you are still willing to stand behind your beliefs in a public discourse. Take care.

Sincerely,

Tony Hepp

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[In all seriousness, the next letter that I received from Jeff made me wonder if he is somewhat mentally retarded. Note also his misspelling of Mr. Tarbet's last name.]

From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2003 8:59 AM  
To: tonyhepp  
Subject: Forward from David **Targett**

Tony:

We have been waiting to hear if your church is going to officially sponsor the debate. They will need to cover all of the expenses involved inviting and hosting the person who will represent the Baptist position. They will also need to cover their share of the costs involved in renting a facility, newspaper ads, and other necessary items. All of these expenses will need to be taken care of without a contribution being taken at the debate. We do not want the debate to be a fund raiser for either side. When you get your own church committed to the debate, please let us know, and we will proceed from there.

Please understand that the hold up is not members of the Church of Christ, but a lack of commitment from your own leaders in the Baptist Church. It's up to you to do what we asked you to do from the very beginning.

I am forwarding a copy of this to Jeff in California. In the future, please contact me at my Dallas e-mail address, as it is inconvenient for Jeff to be forwarding messages to me from California. My address is: [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org](mailto:davidtarbet@wrchurch.org).

Sincerely,

David Tarbet  
White Rock Church of Christ  
Dallas, TX  
[dtarbet@swbell.net](mailto:dtarbet@swbell.net)

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[I wrote the following letter to Jeff in response to his forward of Mr. Tarbet's letter.]

From: Tony Hepp  
To: Jeff  
Sent: Mon, 24 Mar 2003 19:37:00

Jeff,

I'm a little confused by the e-mail below. It is the same message that was sent to me on 2/24/03 by David Tarbet (note the spelling), to which I already responded. On 3/13/03, I sent the following letter to him. I'm still waiting to hear back from him.

-----

Hi David,

The First Baptist Church of Parker, TX will sponsor Bob Ross to defend what we believe the Bible clearly teaches regarding the relationship between water baptism and salvation. Bob's commitment to debate one of your representatives is contingent upon the wording of the proposition and the debate location. I'm sure that you and I can work out both of the aforementioned items without any problems.

Next step - who will argue for the CoC position? Let me know ASAP so that I can relay his name to Mr. Ross.

Look forward to hearing from you soon.

-----

You were CCed on the 3/13/03 and 3/23/03 e-mail. I find it odd, therefore, that you'd forward David's message to me. ???

Again, the ball is in your court. Please volley.

Sincerely,

Tony Hepp

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From: baptism\_1@lycos.com  
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2003 8:51 PM  
To: tonyhepp  
Subject: RE: Forward from David Targett

I just forwarded that to you because it sounded like you had not heard back from him. He sent you that email asking to debate and you sent another back as if he didn't want to debate. I think it is very clear he is still interested in the debate by the copy of the email I just previously sent. Why do you act as if he is the one putting it off? It is he who is wanting to do the debate. I suggest you contact him and set it up. **[Can we all say "irrational"? I acted as if he were putting**

the debate off because I had not heard from him! Why would he suggest I “contact him” when he knows full well that I had already written him?]

-Jeff

-----  
After months of correspondence, now is when the CoC folk start to do the crawfish dance. See Mr. Tarbet’s letter below. Are Mr. Tarbet’s allegations about Mr. Ross correct? Or is he and the other Dallas/Ft. Worth CoC members looking desperately for a way to get out of the challenge before them? I believe the latter.

From: David Tarbet [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org]  
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2003 9:10 PM  
To: tonyhepp  
Subject: RE: Forward from David Targett

Dear Tony:

The elders of the White Rock Church of Christ and I are in receipt of your letter concerning a challenge from the Parker Baptist Church to debate the subject the necessity of baptism for salvation. Tonight (Monday) was the first opportunity we had to discuss the matter thoroughly. We are more than willing to defend what we believe the Scriptures teach on this subject. However, we are not interested in a debate which includes Mr. Bob Ross.

Our concerns about Mr. Ross have to do with his obvious bitterness toward the Church of Christ. This is evident in his books, where he constantly refers to us as “Campbellites”, which (as I mentioned previously) we find offensive. No good can be accomplished by a debater who has a personal agenda and is determined to insult his opponents. In his debate with Mr. Garland Elkins, Ross violated a number of ethical principles, for which he was “called on the carpet”. He was unwilling to stay with the debate propositions, which focused on what the Bible teaches, choosing rather to harangue about the Restoration Movement. Members of Churches of Christ involved in the discussion said Ross’ personal behavior and unethical debate techniques were reprehensible.

According to those who attended the debate, the Baptist Church which sponsored it had around 150 members present the first night, but its members quickly withdrew their enthusiastic support. By the second or third session the number of representatives of that church dwindled to no more than a dozen. Subsequent to the debate the Baptist Church split into various factions, and is now much smaller than it was prior to the debate. However, around 1,000 members of Churches of Christ attended every session, and 19 people were convinced of the necessity of baptism as a direct result of the debate. These individuals left the Baptist Church (as well as other denominations), to become members of the Church of Christ.

I mention these things, not only to explain why we are not interested in a public discussion involving Bob Ross, but also because I am afraid your own congregation would be embarrassed by his conduct.

Perhaps there is someone else who is knowledgeable in Baptist doctrine, who would conduct himself in a gentlemanly manner, whom your congregation would like invite to represent it.

Sincerely yours,

David Tarbet

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From: tonyhepp [tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net]  
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2003 11:20 PM  
To: davidtarbet@wrchurch.org  
Cc: Jeff

Dear David,

Apparently, I accidentally hit a key combination that sent the previous, unfinished message to you. Sorry. Please accept this in place of the former.

Regarding your disdain for the term, Campbellite, I experience the same feelings when I hear professed Christians such as yourself label the church that you attend - Church of Christ. I find the name of the "church" that you attend to be highly offensive because the CoC purports a false Christ that doesn't save.

Calling you a Campbellite doesn't mean someone has a "personal agenda". It simply means they understand the roots of your theological system. Since I wasn't present at the debate between Ross and Elkins, I can't comment on Ross' supposed behavior. But I can say that many former CoC members have become true Christians as a result of the debates within which he has participated.

Even if Bob did (and will again) behave inappropriately, don't you welcome the opportunity to publicly refute what you believe to be false? Considering the fact that you believe Bob is lost, you should expect rude and inappropriate behavior, assuming that he did indeed act out of line. Right?

David - The White Rock CoC and many others in the DFW area unwittingly made a public challenge to all other churches in the metroplex to defend what the Bible teaches. Now, you need to stand behind your challenge. If you will not, I will personally pay for a one page advert to tell DFW that you backed down from a public debate.

Please don't make excuses for your inability to defend the CoC's heretical doctrine. The challenge still stands.

Tony Hepp

---

[On March 23, 2003, I forwarded to Mr. Ross the last letter from Mr. Tarbet. See Mr. Ross' thorough reply below.]

Dear Brother Hepp:

This is rather typical of some (not all) Church of Christ people when they really are basically simply not interested in a debate, whatever they may offer by way of excuse. Such as these seem to be interested only in firing salvos from a safe distance, and really have no interest in putting their views up for examination in public debate. They are not all like this, but it seems in this age those who will participate in honorable public debates are few and far between.

Mr. Targett [Mr. Ross consistently misspells David Tarbet's last name because of Jeff's initial misspelling. See above.] was obviously given a biased report of the Parkersburg debate from sources which were not pleased with that debate -- which many of them were not. I understand that even the minister left his position there not too long after the debate. Displeasure with the debate was especially the case with the "Thomas Warren camp," as I refused to allow Mr. Warren (who deemed himself to be "somewhat" among them) to interject himself into debate, as he was neither my opponent nor a moderator for Mr. Elkins. He did sit close by Mr. Elkins, however, and greatly distracted Elkins by writing notes, charts, and cartoons for Elkins to use. I personally believe this helped to account for Mr. Elkins' poor performance in defense of Church of Christ views, as I had expected better efforts from him.

As for my personal conduct in debates, only irresponsible or uninformed parties would attempt to denigrate my character and ethics. Since the Elkins debate, I have had several debates with Church of Christ ministers who were not distracted by my "reputation" as rendered by Mr. Targett.

The last debate I had with a Church of Christ minister was with Stephen Wiggins, moderated by Church of Christ minister Bill Lockwood, held in Baytown, Texas. Mr. Wiggins later published a review of the debate in his magazine and said, "I also note that Bob Ross is a congenial fellow with whom we had as good a relationship as can be for a polemic enemy and though I do not believe he rose to the issue of debate, he treated us kindly even during the heat of battle" (July-August issue, 1996).

After my debate with Bill Jackson of Austin, Texas in January 1991, Bill sent me a cordial personal letter, commending me and telling me how much he enjoyed the debate. After Bill's death in the Spring of that year, I sent a letter of condolences which the Southwest Church of Christ displayed on their Bulletin Board. After my debate with Buster Dobbs in Baytown, the Missouri Street Church of Christ of Baytown also sent me a letter of commendation regarding the debate. My two Houston debates with David Brown and Tom Bright also were commended by Church of Christ sources. I have a number of commendable comments in my files about my past debates. With only a few "sour grapes" exceptions, I have had favorable comments from those I have debated.

It is unfortunate the Mr. Targett has been prejudiced against me, even though we have never met so far as I recall. Hopefully, we could have had an honorable debate in accordance with the

Rules of Debate, and many might have profited from the exchanges in regard to doctrinal differences.

Here is an article I wrote several years ago about that debate in Parkersburg, West Virginia:

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A Reply to "Spiritual Swordsman" Robert W. Taylor, Jr. as to the ROSS-ELKINS Debate

By Bob L. Ross

The July, 1979 issue of THE SPIRITUAL SWORD magazine carries an article entitled, "A Review of the Elkins-Ross Debate" by the glib "Restorationist," Robert W. Taylor, Jr. Other than giving the facts as to the details of the debate (dates, propositions, place, etc.), the article is at best the purely subjective opinion of one who was already prejudiced before the debate was even held.

In fact, this same Mr. Taylor had written an announcement of the debate for THE GOSPEL ADVOCATE magazine of Nashville in which he even sought to prejudice others against me in advance by accusing me of "maliciousness" and "viciousness" and of being a "militant man of error."

I called this unjustified attack to Mr. Garland Elkins' attention at the outset of the debate, but instead of repudiating the attack, Mr. Elkins defended it in clear violation of Hedges' rules of debate and of Elkins' own statements against such practices in THE SPIRITUAL SWORD magazine, which I read to him at the time.

It would hardly be within the domain of objectivity for such a prejudiced person as Mr. Taylor to be called upon to write a "review" of the debate. This would be as contradictory as asking atheist Madalyn O'Hair to write a review of a debate between Church of Christ preacher Thomas Warren and one of the atheists he has debated.

Rather than reply to Mr. Taylor point-by-point on his obviously prejudiced and inaccurate views, I shall simply point out some of the things he failed to mention that were failures on Mr. Elkins' part during the debate:

1. Mr. Elkins failed to deny that his "plan of salvation" was the same "plan" as the so-called "Restoration Movement" led by men such as the Campbells, Scott, and Stone men who themselves never obeyed the "plan" and were consequently lost forever. Mr. Elkins was on record in The Spiritual Sword magazine as being a strong defender of the RM and was actually affirming the "plan of salvation" which was supposedly "restored" by this movement in the 1800s.

2. Mr. Elkins, however, failed to offer one single word of defense of the Campbells, Scott, and Stone in the "work" which they did, despite the fact he had often written in THE SPIRITUAL SWORD that they had "restored" the gospel, the church, and New Testament

worship. He did not even offer any evidence that any of these men were Christians, just less offering any defense of the fantastic claims he had made for them in his magazine.

3. Elkins failed to deny that each of these "restorers" claimed to have been saved before immersion and that none of them ever obeyed the "plan" taught by Elkins.

4. Elkins failed to explain, in conjunction with his "Blackbird - Acorn - Oak Tree" chart, how this had anything to do with the work of "birds" such as the Campbells, Scott, and Stone.

5. Elkins failed to affirm his proposition that the "scriptures" (plural) affirmed his position, admittedly using Mark 16:16a ONLY in six affirmative speeches, each being twenty minutes' duration. I later proclaimed Elkins the "World's Champion for Least Amount of Scripture Used in a Debate."

6. Elkins failed to acknowledge that I had dealt with the half of Mark 16:16 which he used, despite the fact I replied to his use of the phrase several times and I even had a chart exclusively dealing with the entire verse (to which he never replied and didn't even call for the chart to be shown on the overhead).

7. Elkins failed to demonstrate how the first half of Mark 16:16 was speaking of a present salvation whereas the last half of Mark 16:16 was dealing with a future damnation.

8. Elkins failed to recover the \$5 which I gladly accepted from him when he offered it to me in his first speech in an effort to try to make a point on Mark 16:16a. I told him I would give the money back to him if he would acknowledge that he was "not condemned" when he believed as per John 3:18. I repeatedly offered him the \$5, but he steadfastly refused to acknowledge that he had believed according to the teaching of John 3:18. Thus he did not get his \$5 back and he constantly whined about that.

9. Elkins did not deal with a single one of my charts (nearly 3 dozen) and never called for a SINGLE chart to be re-shown on the over head projector!

10. Elkins failed to defend his teaching about "faith before repentance" as being alive, but rather he admitted that his faith was dead and was not alive until "its first act of obedience, repentance." Thus, he was rightly charged by me of admitting to having a "dead faith" prior to repentance.

11. In regard to dead faith, Elkins also failed to defend the view of J. W. McGarvey that faith is "dead before baptism," but rather repudiated this view of McGarvey, despite the fact THE SPIRITUAL SWORD had called McGarvey a "Restoration giant" (April '73, p. 33). Thus, it was Elkins vs. McGarvey.

12. Elkins failed to demonstrate that God commands men to have a dead faith before repentance despite the fact that he teaches that faith is not alive until "its first act of obedience, repentance."

13. Elkins failed to deny the fact that Alexander Campbell's claim to having been SAVED BEFORE baptism supported the Baptist position on salvation by grace through faith prior to baptism.

14. Elkins failed to show that Alexander Campbell, whom Elkins says "restored the church" (SPIRITUAL SWORD, July '74, p. 47), had any other hope of salvation than salvation by grace through faith before baptism as taught by the Baptists.

15. Elkins also failed to show that he was doing anything more in the debate than reading visuals (overheads) prepared for him by Mr. Thomas Warren who was sitting at his table. Had Garland tried to debate for himself rather than simply serve as a "mouthpiece" for Warren, I am sure he would have fared much better.

16. Elkins did not deny that he was placing himself in opposition to the late B. C. Goodpasture when Elkins said that "Brown Kinnard is wrong" when Brown taught salvation by "faith alone." Goodpasture lists Kinnard in his Preachers of Today book as a preacher of the "good news," and Kinnard wrote in FIRM FOUNDATION magazine that we are saved by "faith alone" (Nov. 27, 1962).

17. Elkins did not deny that when he believed he did not "accept Christ," as per an article in THE SPIRITUAL SWORD by J. D. Bales (April '76, pp. 26, 27).

18. Elkins did not deny that according to his teaching on repentance, one who believed and then repented would be "changing his mind" from belief to unbelief.

19. Elkins failed to properly represent the views of Baptist A. T. Robertson on Mark 16:16, and when I quoted Robertson, rather than confess his misinterpretation Elkins accused Robertson of being double-tongued.

20. Elkins failed to claim the \$10 which I offered for a "book, chapter, and verse" for the so-called "Restoration Movement" about which he has often written in THE SPIRITUAL SWORD, claiming it had restored the Gospel and the church in the 1800s.

21. Elkins failed to tell the audience what the "false and foolish ways" were about which he had prayed for "forgiveness" at a meeting of Church of Christ preachers in Memphis (MEMPHIS MEETING, II, p. 27).

22. Elkins failed to show, in view of his statement that "seed produces after its kind," that he could be anything more than a child of the devil if he was a child of the devil when he was "planted" in baptism.

23. Elkins failed to demonstrate that he was not a "Campbellite," in view of the definition of "Campbellite" by Mr. J. D. Tant, a "Church of Christ" preacher, in his book, THE GOSPEL X-RAY, p. 65.

24. Elkins failed to show that I had misquoted a single time from THE SPIRITUAL SWORD magazine, despite charging me with "misrepresentations."

25. The most obvious failure of all, however, as was most apparent to the audience, was Elkins utter failure to prove from any source that I had made certain statements which were contained within quotation marks on his charts. Furthermore, when he was called upon to allow the visuals to be shown in conjunction with the playing of a tape which supposedly contained such statements, he -- through his moderator (Mr. Merideth) -- adamantly refused! This thoroughly exposed his unwillingness to be fair and to properly represent my views.

Not only did Mr. Elkins fail to do these things (and others I could mention), but I am now predicting that he will also fail to publish this reply to Mr. Taylor in THE SPIRITUAL SWORD.

Note: Since this was written in 1979, THE SPIRITUAL SWORD has never published this reply to Mr. Taylor. They practice the policy of printing misrepresentations and refusing to permit replies. -- Bob L. Ross

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Here is a Review of the Ross-Elkins Debate in 1979 written by my moderator, Pastor Larry Keenan:

Since I am the pastor of one of the two sponsoring-churches and served as the moderator for Bob L. Ross, I feel compelled to review the debate as one who was deeply involved in the arrangement of the debate. These details and observations comprise the debate as observed by this writer.

The debate was originally arranged in September, 1978 as a result of distributing a booklet on my local radio broadcast. The booklet, entitled SOME OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE SO-CALLED CHURCH OF CHRIST by Homer Duncan of Lubbock, Texas, caused a local "Church of Christ" minister to challenge and review the booklet on his radio broadcast. Upon contacting the "Church of Christ" minister, it was agreed that he would write the two propositions to be debated. The Valley View Bible Church of Davisville, West Virginia and the Marietta Bible Center Church of Marietta, Ohio, agreed to sponsor the debate and contacted Mr. Bob L. Ross of Pasadena, Texas. Mr. Ross agreed to debate and the final arrangements were then made. The debate was scheduled for April 16, 17, 19, 20, 1979, at Parkersburg, West Virginia. The debate was held in the Camden Avenue "Church of Christ." This proved to be a minor mistake on our part which I will explain later in this review.

### The Preparation

The Valley View Bible Church began praying for the debate immediately after contacting Bro. Ross and it was evident in the debate that the praying was answered by God because of the unusual nature and circumstances of the debate.

It was apparent that the opposition was set back by the amount of preparation made by Bro. Ross. Ross had put together two booklets to be distributed freely at the debate. These booklets thoroughly set forth the position held by Ross on the two propositions. Another setback to the opposition was the fact that Ross had thoroughly reviewed every issue of THE SPIRITUAL SWORD magazine of which Mr. Elkins is associate editor. This proved to be one of the most devastating blows to Elkins and the so-called "Restoration Movement" as Ross continually turned Elkins' statements back upon himself. At times in the debate it was "Elkins vs. Elkins" and this was evident to those in attendance.

Therefore, as the debate approached we were as the king contemplating war in Luke 14:31. We had counted the cost and were prepared to meet the enemy on his own ground. All advantages were allowed the opposition. They wrote the propositions, they arranged the order which gave them first and last speeches and the debate was in their building.

### The Debate Proper

At the outset, it was apparent that the host minister, Mr. Charles Pugh III and Mr. W. Terry Varner of the Harmar Hill "Church of Christ" were visibly disturbed by the materials which Bro. Ross intended to distribute freely. In our previous agreements, I arranged for a literature table to be provided in order to display and sell the books on Campbellism of which Ross is the author. Pugh and Varner halted our distribution of the free materials which were the debate materials which related to propositions to be discussed. They then charged us with violating the agreement on the literature table.

Nothing had been said in our agreement which would limit the distribution of free debate materials. This was our mistake; we failed to take Campbellite chicanery into account. Had the debate been in a public building, we would have not been "hand-cuffed" regarding distribution of the materials. Since these materials so conclusively exposed the heresy of "Restorationism" and revealed the fact that the propositions under discussion were vitally linked to "Restorationism," it was easy to see why the opposition was trying to halt the distribution of these materials.

In the first two nights of debate it was apparent that the prayers of the righteous had indeed availed to "stop the mouths of the gainsayers," similar to the situation described by Paul in Titus 1:9-11. Mr. Elkins put forth only one-half of one verse in affirming the proposition "Baptism is for (in order to obtain) the remission of past sins."

The only verse set forth in his six twenty-minute speeches was Mark 16:16a. In light of the fact that the January 1979 issue of THE SPIRITUAL SWORD had plenty of ammunition for Mr. Elkins to use, one wonders at his failure to use any other verses except Mark 16:16a.

I believe Elkins was totally unprepared for the task set before him, and had to rely upon charts from "helper" THOMAS WARREN who sat at his table. Warren's charts majored on symbols in Logic and resembled hieroglyphics, and some cartoons which attempted to discredit Brother Ross.

In summary, I believe Mr. Elkins and the "Restoration Movement" were thoroughly refuted due to five major causes:

- o Ross' outstanding preparation and straight-forward presentation. Elkins had many "tacticians" (preachers) working alongside his table; Ross stood alone and faced the enemy. This was unnerving to the opposition.

- o In the agreed exchange of questions it was falsely assumed by Mr. Elkins that Ross would return his answers prior to the first speech by Elkins. This was not the agreement, and Ross refused to answer except from the pulpit during his speech time. This deprived Elkins of material to use in his first speech and led to his frustrated failure to substantiate his proposition. Again this was an unnerving experience for the Elkins' "team."

- o The failure of Elkins to muster any support for his proposition other than Mark 16:16a (one-half of the verse). Elkins was in the affirmative and should have supported his contention with an array of Scriptures. However, he chose to focus an attack upon Baptist beliefs (which were not in debate) and to rail against Baptist personalities.

- o A controversy arose from the floor over a statement attributed to Ross from one of his Monday night speeches. This alleged statement was made a "point of order" and the tape was called for to be played on Thursday night. However, when the time arrived to play the tape I called for the Elkins' chart which contained the misquote to be displayed in order that the audience could see and hear that Ross had NOT made the statement. Mr. Elkins' moderator, Noel Merideth, refused and played the tape without showing the slanderous chart.

When Ross took the platform he called for the chart with the misquote, and the place on the tape where the words in question were spoken. Mr. Elkins' moderator would not play the tape unless the overhead projector and chart were turned off! This action speaks for itself and the audience was keenly aware of this attempt to evade the obvious blunder by Elkins. This clearly served to discredit the integrity of Mr. Elkins as being a fair debater.

- o Elkins' lack of preparedness and his evident confusion which resulted from his continual use of material which was prepared by another party (Tom Warren). Elkins was generally no more than a "puppet" with Warren manipulating the strings. Elkins simply read most of the material and showed complete surprise at the mistakes which had been made when challenged from the floor. This was because the material he was reading was not the work of his own hands.

These five causes were the "five smooth stones" which slew the "Restoration" giants. The "stones" killed two birds -- Elkins and Warren.

## The Results

The presentation of truth concerning the history of the "Restoration Movement" and the propositions debated were so effective that it aroused visible frustration from those in the "Church of Christ." Books were pilfered from our literature table, booklets were torn up and

quantities taken for the sole purpose of destroying them (this was even stated by a "Church of Christ" man picking up the materials) and many unsavory remarks were made to Mr. Ross personally. The "Church of Christ" position was so weak that a local "Church of Christ" radio preacher was pulled-off his normal Bible study in order to bolster the sagging position and the utter failure of Mr. Elkins to sustain either an affirmative argument or a denial of Ross' affirmative.

At this writing, a woman in our church has been saved through reading the booklet "Baptism and the Restoration Movement" on Tuesday night of the debate. This in one of the free booklets provided at the debate. There is also a "Church of Christ" young couple that approached and talked with Mr. Ross at his motel restaurant; they asked for assistance on some questions and are reading the free booklets. They both seem open to the truth which was put forth by Mr. Ross in the debate.

We are looking to the Lord for long-term results from this debate. This was the greatest opportunity ever afforded in this city to expose "Restorationism." Their history is death to their movement.

Pastor Myron Guiller (Marietta, O.), Pastor Leroy Keenan (Walker, W. V.) Sponsors of Bob Ross

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[I forwarded Mr. Ross' letter to Mr. Tarbet. Mr. Tarbet finally wrote me back. See below.]

From: David Tarbet [davidtarbet@wrchurch.org]  
Sent: Tuesday, April 22, 2003 10:15 AM  
To: tonyhepp@sbcglobal.net  
Cc: elleos@attbi.com  
Subject: Discussion on Baptism

Dear Tony:

Please be assured that that we do not hesitate in any way to defend what we believe the Bible teaches on salvation. We stand firm in accepting what the Scripture teaches concerning the necessity of baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4). We are willing to consider a written discussion on this subject with a representative of the Baptist Church if he is a full-time Pastor of a church, has the endorsement of the First Baptist Church, Parker, Texas, as well as a reputation for abiding by the rules of honorable debate and for limiting his arguments to what "the Bible teaches . . . ." [Yep, the crawfish dance is in full effect.]

In future correspondence, please have your church Pastor communicate with us if such an individual is found to represent the First Baptist Church, Parker, Texas.

Sincerely yours,

David Tarbet

for the elders,

White Rock Church of Christ  
Dallas, Texas  
Copy: Hal Brunson, Pastor  
E-mail: [elleos@attbi.com](mailto:elleos@attbi.com)

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From: Tony Hepp  
To: David Tarbet  
Sent: Tue, 22 Apr 2003 22:09:29

Dear David,

As I have already said and you have already read, Mr. Ross has been commended by many CoC debaters. It is quite obvious why your fellowship is unwilling to sponsor a CoC representative to engage Mr. Ross in a public exchange. Your theology would be debunked. Do recall what I stated in my 3/24/03 e-mail to you. I will now begin the process of drafting a one page "exposure" article for the Dallas Morning News. Within it I will clearly, and truthfully, write of your unwillingness to stand behind that which you and many other local CoC groups previously published. [Due to the amount of money and time that I would have had to personally expend to create a full-page newspaper advert for the Dallas Morning News and Ft. Worth Star Telegram, I never did do that which I told Mr. Tarbet. I'm now a poor graduate school student, so I don't think I'll be purchasing even a half-page advert for any newspaper in the near future! This Web page will have to suffice for the time being.]

You agreed to a public debate without any qualifications. Please do not now suggest substitute methods such as e-mail correspondence, especially correspondence with CoC criteria already having been assigned to it.

Resting in Jesus' blood (as opposed to a tank of water),

Tony R. Hepp

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[I received no more messages from Mr. Tarbet.]