

Just Asking
By Cornelius R. Stam

This is a duplication of the Bible Study Booklet written by Cornelius R. Stam, titled “Just Asking”. The duplication was done with permission from Berean Bible Society N112 W17761 Mequon Road, Germantown, WI 53022.

INTRODUCTION

We, here at *Berean Bible Society*, are fundamentalists. For years we have vigorously defended the fundamentals of the Christian faith amid the rising tide of apostasy, while at the same time looking to God for further light on His Word and a clearer understanding of His plans and purposes.

We acknowledge, however, that fundamentalism has suffered a serious spiritual decline. There is not the vital interest in the Word of God or the burden for lost souls that was so evident in our earlier days. Also, while we fundamentalists are united as to the basic truths of Bible Christianity, we are sadly divided on certain matters which are nevertheless of great spiritual and practical importance.

This has brought about the rise of a “*new evangelicalism*” which now proposes to “help” fundamentalists who will accept their suggestions.

Help? First they would have us turn our backs upon faithful men of God and repudiate the name *fundamentalist*, a designation which speaks for itself, and adopt instead the name *evangelical*, which can mean just about anything. Next, they want us to stop being so narrow. We should forget our “theological prejudices” and concentrate on the enormous job to be done in the world about us. We should join hands with apostate unbelievers and become “socially involved” with the world to “win souls for Christ.” Together we can reach the lost “in a big way.”

This kind of “help” we do not need in a day of spiritual decline, corrupt morals, and blatant infidelity. If we accepted this “help” we should find ourselves still farther from the center of God’s will, and this is exactly what has happened to fundamentalists who have accepted it.

But apart from minimizing the importance of God’s revealed will, the neo-evangelicals have no real help to offer the fundamentalists because they trim the branches of the tree instead of laying the axe to the root.

If a patient has a serious case of gall-stones, the doctor does not prescribe more exercise or sleep or fresh air. He says: “We had better operate and remove the *cause* of your illness.” Similarly, when the Church suffers a spiritual decline, it is not enough to say: “We should be united as one, and should win more souls to Christ.” Rather we should diagnose and deal with the *cause* of the decline; then a restoration to spiritual health, a revival of spiritual power, will naturally follow.

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We believe that the root cause of the spiritual decline among Bible-believing fundamentalists in this generation has been the resistance, especially among our spiritual leaders, to that mighty message which Paul by divine inspiration calls *“my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery”* (Rom. 16:25). By and large fundamentalist leaders, for reasons best known to themselves, have kept this great body of truth from their followers and have *warned* them to shun it as heresy. As a result fundamentalism has gone backward rather than forward.

Now, with some of these very leaders fighting a desperate battle against the inroads of neo-evangelicalism, it is our earnest prayer that they will retrace their steps and give serious consideration to the possible *cause* of fundamentalism’s spiritual decline. It is this prayer that has prompted the writing of the following lines, written not only for them but for *all* sincere believers in the Word of God.

JUST ASKING

We believe that *“Christ died for our sins”* so that all who place their faith in Him might be *“reconciled to God in one body by the cross”* (I Cor. 15:3; Eph. 2:16).

We believe that faith in Christ is inwrought by the Holy Spirit and that *“by one Spirit” all true believers are “baptized into one body”* (I Cor. 12:13).

We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that no other baptism has any legitimate place in this *“dispensation of the grace of God.”* Indeed, we believe that the practice of water baptism today is adversely affecting not only the Church’s understanding of the Word of God, but its spiritual power as well.

But then, we are human, just like you, so rather than telling you, we’d like to ask you a few questions—about eighty of them, in fact!

We realize that Satan introduced his lie by asking a question, but then, our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul also brought out many a truth by asking questions. This latter is what, with God’s help, we hope to do.

Please do not take offense at any of the questions we ask, for no offense is intended. Rather, just consider each question honestly, in the light of the Scriptures, and ask God to help you detect any possible errors and to see and receive any truth which you may not have previously understood.

INFANT BAPTISM

JUST ASKING

The subject of Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians is: *“Not Circumcision but Christ.”* Paul sternly rebukes the Galatian believers for departing from the message of grace and going back to circumcision and the law.

In view of this, are not our Presbyterian and Reformed brethren in great error when they teach that baptism takes the place of circumcision? Have they any Scriptural ground for changing God's declaration: "*Not Circumcision but Christ*" to *Not Circumcision but Baptism*"?

JUST ASKING

When Paul, by divine inspiration, writes: "...if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing¹" (Gal. 5:2), is it not entirely out of order to substitute another religious rite "in the place of circumcision"?

JUST ASKING

Do you know of any Scripture that teaches that baptism has taken the place of circumcision? Do you know of any passage that even infers this?

JUST ASKING

Do you know any *record* in Scripture of infant baptism? Do you know of one verse or even one line of Scripture that *teaches* infant baptism?

JUST ASKING

Water baptism, in the Bible, is consistently associated with repentance and faith (Mark 1:4; 15:16; Acts 2:38; 8:36, 37). Can infants either repent or believe?

JUST ASKING

Circumcision, of course, applied only to male children, and according to the law of Moses the rite had to be performed when the child was eight days old. How then could water baptism take the place of circumcision?

JUST ASKING

Dr. Albertus Pieters, a leading Reformed theologian, once acknowledged:

"If some intelligent being from Mars should come to visit our earth, and we should hand him a Bible...he would not find infant baptism in the Bible, because it is not there, and cannot be gotten out of the Bible" (From Pieters' book, "*Why We Baptize Infants*").

How then did this "ordinance" come to take its place among the cardinal doctrines of some of our greatest denominations? Can those who teach and practice this rite escape our Lord's reproof for "*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt. 15:9)?

¹ *Logically*, of course, not actually.

THE IMMERSION OF BELIEVERS

JUST ASKING

Our Baptist friends insist on the immersion of believers in water as “burial with Christ.” Do you know of any passage of Scripture that teaches that *water* baptism signifies burial? *Water* baptism? Does the passage you are thinking of mention *water*?

JUST ASKING

Do we bury our departed loved ones in water? Did they do this in Bible times?

JUST ASKING

Three times in Mark 7:1-8 the words *baptizo* and *baptismos* are translated “wash” and “washing.” Reading this passage, could you possibly make these words mean “bury” or “burial”? Did the Pharisees *bury* their “cups,” “pots,” “brazen vessels” and “tables” before each meal?

JUST ASKING

When Saul of Tarsus was converted to Christ Ananias said to him: “Arise, and be baptized, and *wash* away thy sins.” Can you make water baptism in this case signify burial?

JUST ASKING

In John 3:22-24 we read how both Jesus and John were baptizing² in Judea. Then Verse 25 continues: “Then there arose a question between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about *purifying*.” Does this indicate that baptism was burial or washing?

JUST ASKING

When Peter, at Pentecost, said: “Repent, and be baptized...for the remission of sins,” did he mean “Repent and be *buried*” or “Repent and be *cleansed*”? Is it not clear from the above passages that water baptism was simply a ceremonial cleansing rather than a burial?

JUST ASKING

At Pentecost three thousand people were baptized with water. Would there have been time to *immerse* them all? *Three thousand*?

² Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples” (See 4:2).

JUST ASKING

Ananias found Saul of Tarsus in the house of Judas, on Straight Street in Damascus, and baptized him there (Acts 9:10-17; cf. Acts 22:12-16). Is it probable that Judas had facilities in his home to bury Saul in water?

JUST ASKING

In Acts 8:38 we read of Philip and the Ethiopian prince, that “they went down *both* into the water, *both* Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.” If “down...into the water” here means “under the water”; if it proves that the eunuch was immersed, does it not also prove that Philip immersed himself at the same time? It says that they *both* went down into the water.

JUST ASKING

In Acts 10:47, 48 we read that Cornelius and his household were all baptized. Is it probable that Cornelius just happened to have a receptacle in his home large enough to immerse people in? There is no indication that they went anywhere else for the baptismal service.

JUST ASKING

From Acts 16:33, 34 it seems clear that the Philippian jailor and his household were baptized in prison, *before* they had brought Paul and Silas into the jailor’s house. Is it probable that they just happened to have a receptacle in that prison suitable for burying these believers in water? There is surely no indication here that they went anywhere else to immerse these new converts.

JUST ASKING

Do you know of any Scripture that states that baptism by water is meant to be “a witness to the world”?

JUST ASKING

If baptism by immersion is “a witness to the world,” why is it performed only once? Why not again and again?

JUST ASKING

If baptism by immersion is meant to be “a witness to the *world*,” why is this rite generally performed inside a church building before a company of believers?

JUST ASKING

Is baptism by immersion really the beautiful ceremony that some say it is? Is not the candidate rather “a sorry sight” as he, or she, rises from the “grave” sopping wet, with clothing and hair all in disarray? And, remember, when water baptism *was* in order the facilities were not likely at hand for changes of raiment, and they certainly did not have electric hair dryers!

JUST ASKING

Trying to look at it objectively, is not this burial in water actually a crude, as well as an unscriptural, religious ceremony?

JUST ASKING

Would not the physical difficulties involved in immersion seem to indicate that *Scriptural* baptism was a ceremonial cleansing rather than a burial in water?

JUST ASKING

If the “old man” is buried in water baptism, isn’t he really buried alive? And doesn’t he generally demonstrate this soon after emerging from his “watery grave”?

JUST ASKING

If I am “crucified with Christ” and “raised to walk in newness of life” the moment I place my faith in Christ as Savior, when am I buried with Christ? Does not burial come between death and resurrection? How then can a clergyman bury me with Christ in a baptistery later, after I have already been raised from the dead?

THE GREAT COMMISSION

JUST ASKING

The so-called “great commission,” given to the eleven (later twelve) clearly states: “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*” (Mark 16:16). Working under this commission at Pentecost, Peter said: “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*” (Acts 2:38). Is not this clear?

If a teacher or preacher of the Word alters Mark 16:16 to read: “He that believeth and is saved should then be baptized,” can you be sure he will not also alter some other passage of Scripture to fit with his personal system of doctrine?

JUST ASKING

If he changes Acts 2:38 to mean something else, can you trust him not to tamper with other Scriptures?

JUST ASKING

If Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 mean what they say, does it not follow that water baptism was required for salvation at Pentecost, under the “great commission”?

How is it, then, that so many who agree that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation, nevertheless maintain that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost under the “great commission”?

JUST ASKING

Our Campbellite (or Disciples) friends insist that water baptism is necessary to salvation. In the light of Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38, both of which require water baptism for the remission of sins, are they not more consistent, Scripturally, than most of their critics?

JUST ASKING

However, Mark 16:17, 18 lists a series of miraculous signs and states: “*These signs shall follow them that believe.*” Acts 2:38 indicates the same. In the light of this are not the Pentecostalists more consistent than the Campbellites, who hold to water baptism but reject miraculous signs as unscriptural for our day? Do those who claim to be working under the “great commission” have the right to choose which orders they wish to obey?

JUST ASKING

Do not baptism and miraculous signs go together in the Bible generally as they do in the “great commission”? Can you find one record of a baptism by water that is not accompanied by an account of a miraculous sign or signs?

JUST ASKING

At Pentecost, Spirit-filled Peter, working under the so-called “great commission,” said: “Repent and be baptized *every one of you*...for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). How is it, then, that so many pastors who claim to be working under the “great commission” call water baptism a “non-essential,” leaving it up to each individual to decide whether or not he “feels led” to be baptized?

JUST ASKING

However, when the Campbellites teach that water baptism is necessary to salvation today, are they not contradicting Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5 and many other passages from the Pauline epistles?

JUST ASKING

Likewise, when the Pentecostalists teach that tongues and other miraculous signs are in God’s program for this age, do they not contradict I Cor. 13:8-10?

JUST ASKING

According to Mark 16:15-18, water baptism was necessary to salvation and miraculous signs were the evidences of salvation. If this commission is in force today, are not thousands of sincere believers in Christ lost after all because they have not fulfilled the requirements and/or do not have the evidences of salvation set forth in this commission?

JUST ASKING

Does not II Cor. 5:14-21 indicate that the risen, glorified Lord in heaven later sent Paul forth with a *new* commission? (See also Gal. 1:11, 12; 2:2, 7; Eph. 3:1-4; II Tim. 1:9-11; Tit. 1:3).

JUST ASKING

Is there not a striking difference between Peter, at Pentecost, demanding repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and Paul, later proclaiming Christ's righteousness for the remission of sins (Rom. 3:26)?

JUST ASKING

If the water baptism of the "great commission" and Pentecost is "Christian baptism," why do so many Bible teachers and pastors apologize for baptism instead of preaching it with the urgency of Peter?

BAPTISM AND THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

JUST ASKING

If water baptism were Scriptural for the present "dispensation of the grace of God," where would you expect to find it commanded in the Bible? In the "Old Testament"? In the four "Gospels" or the Acts? In the Hebrew Christian epistles or the Revelation? Or would you expect to find it in the epistles of Paul?

JUST ASKING

Can you find any passage in the epistles of Paul where he commands or even exhorts us to be baptized with water?

JUST ASKING

It is true that Paul baptized some during his *early* ministry—he also spoke with tongues and wrought miracles and circumcised Timothy—but did he *teach* baptism? Was this part of his special commission? (See I Cor. 1:14-18). Did not baptism, like miraculous signs, rather belong to the dispensation from which he emerged as God revealed to him His program for this present age?

JUST ASKING

At Pentecost, those who repented and believed were baptized with water (Acts 2:41). They were also baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). How many baptisms were in order, then, at Pentecost?

JUST ASKING

In Paul's epistles we learn that there is now but "*one baptism*" (Eph. 4:5), the baptism by which the Holy Spirit unites all believers into "*one body*" (I Cor. 12:13). Does not this eliminate water baptism from God's program for today?

JUST ASKING

Paul's epistles declare that in this dispensation of grace *all believers* are baptized "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27), "into His death...burial and resurrection" (Rom. 6:3; Col. 2:10-12) and "into one body" (I Cor. 12:13)—all "*by the operation of God*" (Col. 2:10-12).

Since God's Word declares that for the Body of Christ there is but one baptism, do we not disobey and dishonor Him if we add another?

JUST ASKING

If we practice any rite which was once required for the remission of sins, do we not cast reflections on the finished work of Christ for salvation?

JUST ASKING

Would it be merely unnecessary, or would it be *wrong* in our day to offer the blood sacrifices once required for the remission of sins? Then would it be merely unnecessary or would it be *wrong* to practice the baptism by water once required for the remission of sins?

JUST ASKING

If a pastor doubts in his heart that water baptism is Scriptural for today and then baptizes a candidate, solemnly invoking "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," is he not taking the name of the Lord in vain? What does Ex. 20:7 say about this?

UNION BY COMPROMISE

JUST ASKING

Is an *interdenominational* organization possible apart from compromise? Is *transdenominationalism* (This is the latest!) basically any different from *interdenominationalism*? Is it not a fact that *interdenominationalism* and *transdenominationalism* alike are founded on compromise; that they are based upon an agreement, implied or otherwise, to emphasize *only* those doctrines on which their participants are agreed?

JUST ASKING

Is it not true that the proclamation of important Bible doctrines may be, and usually are, thus suppressed?

JUST ASKING

Can God bless compromise where the truth of His Word is concerned? Can He bless us if we deliberately suppress certain Bible truths for expediency's sake? (See Acts 20:20, 27).

JUST ASKING

There is, for example, one major Bible doctrine on which *interdenominational* Bible institutes and colleges can take no clear, positive stand. This doctrine is *water baptism*.

Interdenominational schools cannot take *any specific position* on this important subject because their board and faculty members are not agreed as to what *is* the Scriptural position.

But if a Bible student cannot learn the truth about a Bible doctrine at a Bible school, where can he expect to learn it?

JUST ASKING

Do you know that the professing Church is so divided on the subject of baptism that *there is no majority for any one view*?

How, then, could an *interdenominational* school take a bold stand for the *truth* about baptism without losing financial support?

Could this be part of the reason why so many of the leaders of *interdenominational* organizations have avoided given serious consideration to the distinctive character of Paul's God-given message with its "one body" and "one baptism"?

BIBLE TRUTH SUPPRESSED

JUST ASKING

Do you agree that compromise, where God's truth is concerned, can lead to serious evils? Let's take one example and then ask a few more questions.

Here is an interdenominational Bible school. Its official board and its faculty are made up of men from various denominations—all believers in the Bible as the Word of God, but nevertheless representing different denominations.

It takes but a moment's reflection to see that certain important subjects cannot be freely discussed in such a school, notably the subject of water baptism, on the meaning and mode of which the denominations so sharply disagree and which, in its different forms, is still the door of entry into most denominational churches.

Let one instructor in this school become too aggressive in championing his personal views on this subject and there will soon be resentment or dissatisfaction among the other faculty members and grave concern among the board members over continued financial support.

Water baptism has unquestionably been a subject over which much of the difficulty has arisen in past years, but the so-called "great commission," the distinctive character of Paul's message and apostleship, the mystery of the "one Body" and other truths are all involved, and it is difficult to keep away from too many Bible subjects at a Bible institute or college! Therefore class discussion on the subject of baptism is generally discouraged.

In any case the best the student in search of truth may expect to find on such a subject at such a school is the conflicting views of the various denominations represented. Certainly the interdenominational school can offer him little specific instruction on the subject.

But now consider the crippling effect these attempts at union by compromise are having upon the leadership of today and tomorrow.

How can an instructor in Bible truth have spiritual power in his ministry when he dare not teach what he believes; when, even if he has the answer he may not impart it to his students with any degree of emphasis because the board, the faculty and the financial supporters are disagreed on the subject? And by what miracle can he prevent his unfaithfulness from having its effect on the students under him?

Let us take stock. Where are the Bible teachers of yesterday, those spiritual giants who helped so many thousands to a clearer understanding of the Scriptures? They have all but vanished. The Bible teachers and pastors of our day speak more and more in generalities. They dare not be specific. More and more their sermons are “devotional,” “inspirational” or superficially evangelistic, while their hearers long for *food* and *light* from the Word. And as to today’s missionaries and evangelists, with many of them there is a deplorable lack of knowledge and conviction where Bible doctrine is concerned. Indeed, the feeling is quite prevalent that missionaries and evangelists need not be too proficient in doctrine—their business is to win souls! And so the mighty power of the Word of God is frittered away.

Another disastrous result of this spirit of compromise has been an over-emphasis on *methods*, taught especially in our Christian Education courses.

We do not for one moment minimize the importance of methods in conducting the work of the Lord, but it is nevertheless a fact that a lack of emphasis on the *message* invariably results in an *over-emphasis* on *methods*.

It is a sad fact that many a pastor, noting a decrease in his audiences, begins automatically to look for a new *plan* rather than searching first for a possible spiritual cause and a spiritual remedy. Many such a pastor learned this at school. The importance of *spiritual power* in his ministry was not impressed upon him there because truth was compromised for expediency. The final results: he may become a “successful” pastor as far as the size of his congregation is concerned, for methods do bring results, but his church will be as lacking in inspiration and spiritual power as he.

THE ONLY SOLUTION

The cure for this deplorable condition is exactly what the *true* “grace movement” has in its hand. May she make good use of it! May she never waver!

And what is this cure? Is not the answer found in Rom. 16:25, 26, where the Apostle Paul closes the great epistle with the words:

“Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to MY GOSPEL, and THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY, which was kept secret since the world began,

“But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets [Lit., “prophetic scriptures,” i.e., his own] according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

In Paul’s “gospel of the grace of God” and the glorious mystery revealed to him by the glorified Lord, we have *the Scriptural answer* to the confusion which has gripped the Church in our day.

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Those who understand this message will no longer seek in vain to carry out the wrong commission. They will no longer add the water ceremony from another dispensation to the “one baptism” of this. They will no longer confuse the “gospel of the grace of God” with “the gospel of the kingdom.” They will no longer wonder which denomination is right, but will understand the basic cause of denominational division.

Is not this message worth at least looking into, prayerfully, objectively and in the light of the Word?

REVIVAL WHEN?

For all too many years now tens of thousands of sincere believers have worked, prayed and hoped in vain for a true spiritual revival in the Church.

We now have means of communication by which we can reach audiences much larger than yesterday’s preachers and Bible teachers ever dreamed of.

The largest audiences of all time have been drawn to evangelistic meetings in cities, not only across the nation but throughout the world.

Yet with all of this we are perhaps farther away from a true spiritual revival than ever. Why is this?

Is it perhaps because so many of our spiritual leaders have closed their eyes to truths they should understand and proclaim? Is it because, in their desire to enlarge their following, they have reduced their doctrinal standards to a bare minimum and thus *cannot* consider, much less proclaim truths that are not popular among all believers—and even religious unbelievers? In a word, is it because they have placed the will of man above the Word of God?

Is it not high time that all true men of God humble themselves before Him and give serious consideration to His message for us today, with its “one body” and “one baptism” and thus purge out the root cause of today’s confusion as to Bible interpretation?

IN CLOSING

Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized into *our death* at Calvary (Luke 12:50), taking upon Himself all the shame and disgrace—and all the penalty for our sins.

Next, remember that we become one with Christ as *we* are baptized into *His* death by faith:

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3)

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In other words, we must look to Calvary in faith, saying: “This is not *His* death He is dying. He had no death to die, for ‘the wages of *sin* is death’ (Rom. 6:23), ‘The soul that *sinneth*, it shall die’ (Ezek. 18:4), and ‘*sin* when it is finished, bringeth forth death’ (James 1:15). He is dying *my* death to pay the penalty for *my* sins.”

Calvary is always the meeting place between the sinner and God. There is no other. It is in looking by faith to Calvary, acknowledging His death as our death, that we are “crucified with Christ” and “baptized into His death.”

There is nothing mystical or unreal about this. His crown of thorns, the scourging, the nails, the cross—these were all most real, as was the awful agony in His heart when He cried: “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*” And this *was* indeed *our* death, the penalty for all *our* sins. He had identified Himself with us sinners in the fullest possible way, sin itself apart.

And our death with Him is just as real as by faith we confess His death to be ours, identifying *ourselves* with Him!

Now, having “died with Him,” we are also raised with Him to walk “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). We now live *His* life—eternal life is ours *in Christ*.

Best of all, none of us are alone in this; indeed, as we are baptized into Christ we are also “baptized into one body” by *the Spirit* (See I Cor. 12:13), eternally and inseparably united with the blessed company of those who are one with each other³ because they are one with Christ!

³ Whether or not they fully appreciate and enjoy this fact.