

Prima Fide: J. Cottrell's ubiquitous non-sequitur and the occasional condition of salvation

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I. Not by exegesis alone: The necessity of addressing defeater beliefs

Due to their desire to preserve the doctrines of *sole gratia* and *fide*, many American credo-baptists have been “uncomfortable” with the New Testament’s “close association” of water baptism with the reception of saving grace. And such discomfort has produced interpretations of key soteriological texts which seem to “avoid the obvious sense of the verse”.¹ Yet because these irregular readings result not simply from unsound exegesis, but from underlying convictions which are historical, theological, and philosophical, their revision requires more than mere literary illumination. For such provincial presuppositions effect not only the probability of a sacramental interpretation, but even its possibility. Therefore, if the efforts of certain mid-20th century British reformers (e.g. H. Wheeler Robinson, Neville Clark, R.E.O. White, Alec Gilmore, et al.) are to inform the spread of sacramentalism stateside (as some suggest), then their American counterparts should learn from their infecundity when using exegetical arguments isolated from a larger conceptual framework.² For if the persuasive plea of George Beasley-Murray’s exegesis failed to sway the “grassroots Baptists” of his day, what hope remains for the mere linguistic contentions of his liturgical descendants?³

¹ A. B. Caneday, “Baptism in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement”, in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 310-311. For a similar assessment of credo-baptist, baptismal exegesis, see Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study*, (Joplin: College Press Publishing CO, 2002), 7-9. See also, Jack Cottrell, *Set Free: What the Bible Says About Grace* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2010), 244-272; Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum*, (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013); Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: the British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism*, (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2002); Stephen J. Wellum, “The Means of Grace: Baptism”, in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis*, ed. by John H. Armstrong (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 149-170.

² The inadequacy of mere exegetical contention among mid-20th century British sacramentalists is well documented in Brandon C. Jones, “Baptist Sacramental Theology: A Covenantal Framework for Believer’s Baptism” (PhD, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2010), 26-51.

³ This paper aims to facilitate a baptismal rapprochement (a “*Consensus Americanus*”) between the Churches of Christ and their credo-baptist kinsmen. Its call for a paradigmatic shift among ordinance-only baptists, however, does not suggest that the concessional burden is entirely one-sided. Indeed, both traditions require refinement if sacramental common ground is to be reached. See section II.3. See also, John Mark Hicks, “*Consensus Tigurinus* and a Baptismal Rapprochement between Baptists and Churches of Christ”, in *SCJ*, 17 (Fall 2014); “Seeking Consensus: A ‘Kinder, Gentler’ Campbellite Baptismal Theology”, Paper prepared for the Baptist-Churches of Christ Dialogue in Texas held at Hardin Simmons University and Abilene Christian University, January 30-31, 2004; Stanley K. Fowler, “Baptists and Churches of Christ in Search of a Common Theology of Baptism”, in *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, SBHT Volume 25 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 254-269.

Part of the problem for first generation British sacramentalists was that this “new” teaching did not sound sufficiently “Baptist”.⁴ In other words, the dogmatic belief that Baptists have always been non-sacramental (untested and false as it may be) functioned as an undercutting defeater for even the most eloquent of exposition.⁵ And it was not until a generation later that Stanley K. Fowler’s monograph *More than a Symbol* provided an escape from this limiting assumption by demonstrating that a sacramental conception of baptism, far from being a novelty, was actually a return to the movement’s soteriological roots. Thus, by defeating the defeater, Fowler made the option of sacramental readings live again.

Deluding presuppositions are not, of course, limited to lapses in historical reflection, but equally emerge in the spheres of theology and philosophy. An intriguing example of the later, yet one which has received little reflection, is proposed by Stone-Campbell theologian Jack Cottrell. Cottrell’s radical thesis is that an elementary error in reasoning (a non-sequitur) has created a prevailing paradigm to which all baptismal texts must submit. And that this restrictive framework has led many scholars to reject even the possibility of reading such passages sacramentally.⁶ Given its relative obscurity and the congenial consequences of its truth (at least for a growing number of American sacramentalists⁷), Cottrell’s bold contention warrants closer consideration.⁸

II. J. Cottrell’s ubiquitous non-sequitur

In a recent essay, Baptist scholar A. B. Caneday contends that the contrived baptismal exegesis of his kinsmen is not merely the result of “theological bias,” but of conflating “biblically distinct causation”. For Caneday the problem lies in merging “the means of salvation with its ground.” This occurs when an intermediary condition (e.g. faith or baptism) is “exalted” to the status of efficient cause, with the historical results being either “baptismal regeneration” (which “invests”

⁴ Ibid, 49.

⁵ For the purposes of this article, references to the notion of epistemic defeat (or, defeasibility) are general. The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://www.iep.utm.edu/ep-defea/>) defines defeasibility as “a kind of epistemic liability or vulnerability, the potential of loss, reduction, or prevention of some positive epistemic status.” A defeater belief then is one which, if true, undermines reasons for ascent to a second belief. And such defeasibility can relate either to the probability of an interpretation (a undercutting defeater), or its possibility (a rebutting defeater). See John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986).

⁶ Jack Cottrell, “The Tyranny of the Paradigm. Part 2”, <http://jackcottrell.com/notes/the-tyranny-of-the-paradigm-part-2/> [accessed February 29, 2020]. See also, “The Tyranny of the Paradigm. Part 3”, <http://jackcottrell.com/notes/the-tyranny-of-the-paradigm-part-3/> [accessed February 29, 2020].

⁷ For e.g., A. B. Caneday, “Baptism”; Thomas Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers”, in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 67-96; Robert H. Stein, “Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament”, *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2.1 (1998), 6-17 and “Baptism in Luke-Acts”, in *Believers Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 35-66. For a broader list of scholars who affirm baptism’s soteriological function see Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 46 n. 24.

⁸ While this paper focuses upon baptism’s effective function, there is much more to the sacrament’s soteriological contribution than its role as concomitant condition. See e.g. Wellum, “The Means of Grace: Baptism”, 153-162. See also, David F. Wright, “Recovering Baptism for a New Age of Mission,” Donald Lewis & Alister McGrath, eds., *Doing Theology for the People of God. Studies in Honor of J.I. Packer* (Downers Grove & Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 51-66.

the water ritual with “effectual cleansing power”), or a kind of “credal regeneration” (which assigns to a “human decision” the saving power God’s grace alone possesses). And while some within the Churches of Christ have chosen the former, which devalues the role of faith in initial salvation, many modern Evangelicals have embraced the latter, which divests baptism of any divine power.⁹

II.1. The defeater defined

Professor Caneday, however, is not the first to suggest as antecedent to this American-Baptist interpretive deficiency a confusion concerning the causal nexus of conversion.¹⁰ Stone-Campbell theologian, Jack Cottrell, has been opining in this direction for at least three decades. But, for Cottrell, the issue is not the conflation of grounds and means (i.e. the unwarranted promotion of a mere human response to the seat of divine efficacy), but rather a failure to distinguish between two appropriating conditions which are functionally distinct.¹¹

Most Protestants are guilty of a serious error in...assuming that the means by which salvation is received is the same as the occasion during which it is received. They assume that being saved “by faith” means the same thing as being saved “as soon as you have faith.”¹²

For Cottrell the conflation between the instrumental condition of grace (or, the means *by which* it is appropriated) and the occasional condition of grace (or, the time and place *during which* it is appropriated) disregards simple logic given the fact that “a necessary condition is not *necessarily* a sufficient [one].”¹³

The fallacious nature of this non-sequitur becomes evident once the argument is stated syllogistically:

- (i) The instrumental condition is *how* one receives saving grace
 - (ii) Faith is the sole instrumental condition
- ∴ *At the moment* of faith one receives saving grace

Even if both premises are true, the conclusion does not follow necessarily and thus the argument is invalid. Just because faith is the sole instrument by which one acquires salvation, does not mean he will receive such deliverance the moment he believes. Or, stated more aphoristically (in antimetabolic structure no less): Just because faith is the sole means doesn’t therefore mean it’s

⁹ A. B. Caneday, “Baptism”, 311-12; 325.

¹⁰ In this paper, shortened soteriological terminology (e.g. ‘conversion’, ‘initiation’, ‘salvation’, etc.) encompasses the entire process of receiving the gift of redemption (equal to Dunn’s endocentric lexeme: conversion-initiation). See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examining of the New Testament on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1977), 5-7.

¹¹ Both Caneday and Cottrell advocate a balanced sacramentalism (a *via media* between effectual regeneration and effete symbolism), yet the former views it as an issue of *sola gratia*, the latter *sola fide*.

¹² Jack Cottrell, *Set Free*, 209.

¹³ “Tyranny...Part 3”. While the term “instrument” could have a broad connotation concerning appropriating conditions (in which baptism would be included), here its use is narrower referring only to the “how” of grace reception.

the sole condition. Technically this form of non-sequitur is known as *quaternio terminorum* (i.e. the fallacy of “four terms”) and it occurs when a categorical syllogism has four (or more) concepts rather than the requisite three. The fundamental mistake of such an argument is that it attempts to reach two conclusions with just one syllogism. In this case, the first conclusion deals with the “how” of receiving salvation (the instrumental condition), while the second addresses the “when” (the occasional condition).

The first of these questions (the one concerning *how* salvation is received) can be stated in valid-syllogistical form as follows:

- (i) The instrumental condition is *how* one receives saving grace
- (ii) Faith is the sole instrumental condition
- ∴ Faith is *how* one receives saving grace

Not only is this a valid argument, but, for many credo-baptists, both premises are true (the major premise being true by definition, the minor premise being not only the clear testimony of scripture, but also the dominant Evangelical interpretation since the days of Luther), and therefore its reasoning is sound. The “when” question, however, remains unanswered. “When does faith receive salvation?” requires its own syllogism which could go something like this:

- (i) The occasion is *when* one receives saving grace
- (ii) The *moment* of faith is the occasion
- ∴ The *moment* of faith is *when* one receives saving grace

Again, the structure of this argument is valid, but to be compelling true premises are required. And while the major premise is true by definition, the verity of the minor premise can only be determined by scripture. “Does one receive saving grace at the moment of faith?” is an inquiry which demands a theological response (grounded in sound exegesis), and yet, due to the influence of the non-sequitur, many credo-baptists have never even considered the question (assuming that if faith is the “how” it is also the “when”).¹⁴ Thus, for Cottrell, a simple error in reasoning has led exegetes to immediately dismiss the dozens of texts which describe water baptism as salvation’s occasional condition. For when viewed through the lens of the non-sequitur, such passages cannot mean what they appear to mean unless contradiction be embraced.¹⁵ If logic necessitates that faith is both the *how* and the *when*, then believers-baptism is eliminated as a condition of initial salvation, regardless of how persuasive the biblical data is.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Tyranny...Part 2”.

¹⁵ In other words, the non-sequitur functions as a rebutting defeater. See n.5.

¹⁶ While, in this scenario, it is still logically possible for baptism to serve as the locational condition (i.e. the place *where* initial faith receives grace), the difficulty of intentionally immersing someone at that precise moment renders it improbable. Therefore, all references to baptism as the occasional condition include both the “where” and “when” of initial salvation.

In support of his sweeping thesis, Cottrell provides only a single example.¹⁷ Norman Geisler, in his *Systematic Theology*, critiques Cottrell's occasionist view by rejecting, seemingly on the basis of the non-sequitur, the need for any further condition than faith:

Cottrell accepts the New Testament affirmation of faith as the means of receiving the gift of salvation: "Faith is still the primary condition because it is the *sole means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of other conditions that serve other purposes." However, he does not appear to see the inconsistency of adding three more conditions for being saved. If faith is the only means of salvation, why is something else necessary?¹⁸

If by "means" Geisler means (as Cottrell does) the instrument by which one receives initial salvation (if he is referring to the "how" of grace reception), then he appears to have taken a syllogistical misstep.¹⁹ For, as Cottrell has demonstrated, *solus conditione* does not follow necessarily from *sola fide*. And yet for Cottrell's theory to hold true, such causal clumsiness cannot be limited to a single *faux pas*, but must stumble about on the soteriological stage of Evangelicalism.

II.2. *The defeater defended*

Although the amount of research necessary to confirm Cottrell's ambitious thesis is beyond the scope of this article (and, perhaps, beyond historical enquiry itself), several striking instances of the non-sequitur are discussed.²⁰ However, determining underlying assumptions from written

¹⁷ "Tyranny...Part 3". See also, *Set Free*, 231.

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 494 (italics original).

¹⁹ It is possible that Geisler is using "means" here as a substitute for the more general concept of "condition", and if so he has not violated the norms of informal logic, at least not explicitly. For if faith is the *only* condition, then all others must be excluded (including baptism). Such an interpretation is unlikely, however, given that it would require Cottrell's error (or at least Geisler's perception of it) to be the absurd contention that salvation stipulates both a single condition and four conditions simultaneously. That Geisler would believe Cottrell to be so obtuse, or that he himself would erect so obvious a strawman, are both considerably less likely than reading "means" as instrument in this context. In addition, Geisler (490) defines Cottrell's use of "means" as follows: "Faith [for Cottrell] is unique among the four supposed conditions of salvation, for 'faith as a condition for salvation is the means by which grace is received.' Hence, faith is more than a qualification—it is *the medium by which salvation is obtained* (italics added)." As if to remove all doubt, Geisler (495) offers this objection to confession as a condition of salvation: "Cottrell contends that faith is the means of salvation; *consequently*, a person is already saved by faith before he confesses his faith (italics added)."

²⁰ Data were collected from the sources listed in the annotated bibliography of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), Appendix 4; a list which, in Grudem's estimation, contains "most of the major evangelical systematic theologies available in English." This bibliography was first narrowed to exclude paedobaptists and then expanded to include more recent publications including: Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Robert Duncan Culvar, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Geanies House, Fearn: Mentor, 2005); James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical 2nd ed.* (N. Richland Hills: Bibal Press, 2001); Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2004); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (General Editors), *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017); Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Greg Nichols, *Lectures in Systematic*

texts is notoriously difficult and therefore, except for explicit statements, the following occurrences should (at best) be accepted provisionally.

II.2.1. Explicit articulations

While the evidence for Cottrell's defeater is mostly circumstantial, explicit articulations of it do occur. The most conspicuous of these is found in John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue's work *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*:

A sinner will not be declared righteous in God's sight unless he believes, and it is only through the instrumentality of faith that he will lay hold of the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus, it is proper to place faith before justification, and *because faith is itself the instrumental cause of justification, nothing ought to come between them.*²¹

For MacArthur and Mayhue, if faith is the *means by which* divine righteousness is received then it is also the *moment during which* it is received. Therefore, baptism must be "excluded...as a necessary prerequisite" for such would be "contrary to...Scripture" which clearly decrees that "salvation is solely *by* faith."²² Because the time of salvation is inducibly tethered to its instrument, the heterogeneity of Pauline salvation (that it is both "by faith" and "in baptism") is obscured to these authors.²³ As a result, baptismal texts such as Acts 2:38 and 22:16 are stripped of their soteriological shine through coarse exegesis.²⁴

Another seemingly clear statement of the non-sequitur is found in Rolland McCune's systematic theology:

Theology Volume 3: Doctrine of Christ (Self-Published, 2018). In total, twenty-two systematic theologies were examined including Grudem's own work.

²¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 569 (italics added).

²² MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 789 (italics added). None of the passages referenced in support of this claim (i.e. John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 3:21-30; 4:5; 10:9-10; Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9) are inconsistent with water baptism being the occasional condition. A more familiar factor fomenting this aversion to reading baptism sacramentally is an overly inclusive view of Paul's "excluded" works (Rom. 3:28; Ga.1 2:16; Phil. 3:9, etc.): "By confusing the symbol of water baptism with the reality of God's grace in salvation, they eliminate the reality by adding works to the gospel" (785). Further discussion of this defeater is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that musings on the meaning(s) of ἔργων νόμου are legion, and that Cottrell offers a plausible account consistent with his teachings on baptism. See *Set Free*, 245-272. See also, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Romans Volume 1* (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 112-115; 265-271.

²³ For an illustration of Paul's distinction between faith and baptism without dissociation see Colossians 2:12: συνταφέντες αὐτοῖς ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγέρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. See also John Calvin, *The Consensus Tigurinus* (1549), trans. Henry Beveridge, Article 9: "Wherefore, though we distinguish, as we ought, between the signs and the things signified, yet we do not disjoin the reality from the signs, but acknowledge that all who in faith embrace the promises there offered receive Christ spiritually".

²⁴ An example of MacArthur and Mayhue's theologically determined exegesis is their pressed interpretation of the preposition εἰς in Acts 2:38. Following fellow credo-baptists Julius R. Mantey and A.T. Robertson, the editors supplant the traditional reading (i.e. "for the purpose of") with the linguistically impoverished "because of". Such imposed exposition is necessary, however, due (at least in part) to the perceived contradiction in confirming the conditional function of baptism. For a fuller assessment of this problematic preposition see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 975. See also, Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 369-371; Ralph Marcus, "On Causal Eis", JBL 70.2 (Jun. 1951), 129-30; Ralph Marcus "The Elusive Causal Eis", JBL 71.1 (March 1952), 43-44. For a showcase of similarly strained, baptismal exegesis see Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 496-504.

It is the ‘objective God-righteousness of Jesus Christ’ that is credited to the believer in a judicially constitutive act of God at the time of saving faith. It occurs at initial faith *because a person can be justified only through faith* in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:9-13).²⁵

Like MacArthur and Mayhue, McCune appears to conflate the “how” and “when” of grace reception. Because faith is the instrument by which salvation is appropriated, one receives this redemption the moment he believes. Therefore, water baptism “has symbolic value only” because “no spiritual power is transferred to the candidate *by* the ordinance”.²⁶

II.2.2. Appeals to specious evidence

A second potential form of Cottrell’s non-sequitur concerns appeals to specious evidence. While numerous scholars insist on initial faith occasioning salvation, their supporting citations fail to establish such temporal utility.²⁷ Wayne Grudem, for example, expels water baptism from the *ordo salutis* because “justification... takes place at the point of saving faith.” However, the biblical data Grudem marshals to buttress this belief (e.g. Rom 3:25; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9) speak merely to the means of salvation (i.e. that grace comes *διὰ* [or *ἐκ*] *πίστεως*), not its occasion.²⁸ And while a time element may be assumed by the apostle in such texts, it is unlikely—at least for these interpreters—for the following reasons. Firstly, for exegetes of the “old perspective”, Paul’s primary concern in these passages is to contrast two systems of salvation (i.e. grace and law) and the means consistent with appropriating each (i.e. faith and works, respectively). Thus, the apostle is laboring to demonstrate *how* God’s righteousness is to be received (i.e. *by* grace *through* faith as opposed to *by* law *through* works), not *when* this reception takes place (i.e. whether *in* faith, *in* baptism, or *in* a particular law work).²⁹ Secondly, in all three of these letters,

²⁵ *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity Volume Three: the Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 100-101.

²⁶ Ibid, 272-273 (italics added). Express statements of Cottrell’s non-sequitur are also phrased in the reverse (i.e. if baptism is not the means, then it is not a condition). See, e.g. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 1096 (italics original, underline added): “The act of baptism conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing. In particular, we are not regenerated *through* baptism, for baptism *presupposes* faith and the salvation to which faith leads. It is, then, a testimony that one has already been regenerated”. In other words, because baptism is not the means (or even the cause), it is not a condition. See also, Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1969), 821 (italics added): “The Scriptures represent baptism to be not the means but only the sign of regeneration, and *therefore* to presuppose and *follow* regeneration”. Cottrell’s defeater seems to prevent Strong from seeing that baptism can be both a sign and the occasion without being the means.

²⁷ James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, 289-290; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 496; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982 n. 26; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 785; John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 318-319; Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion: In its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Roger Williams Press, 1917), 389-392; Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 324-325; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology Volume II* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 393-394.

²⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982 n. 26. He references Rom 3:25, 26, 28; 4:16; 5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9.

²⁹ For paradigmatic examples of the “old perspective” on Paul, see Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960). For more recent studies, see Jack Cottrell, *Romans Volumes 1 and 2* (College Press NIV Commentary; Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1996); Colin G. Cruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (PNTC;

Paul states that the moment of man's mystical union with the Messiah is at baptism (Rom 6:1-11; Gal 3:26-27; Eph 2:4-6, cf. Col 2:11-14).³⁰ Given this, John Miley's boast (that it is so "openly true" that faith is the sole condition that "mere reference to a few texts will suffice") seems remiss unless something like the non-sequitur is operating in the background.³¹ These scholars seem to assume that if faith is the means (as Paul plainly professes) it is also the moment.

II.2.3. Assumptions of a necessitas medii

When refuting the occasionist position theologians often point to "dry" salvation accounts in order to rule out baptism's conditional nature.³² For if the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), or the pious centurion (Acts 10:44-48) could be washed without water, then redemption cannot be dependent upon ritual cleansing. However, such is only the case if the act of ablution has a *necessitas medii* rather than a *necessitas praecepti*. If baptism is merely the moment of salvation (rather than the means), then its necessity is relative and such proof-texts lose their polemical force.³³ Given its proper function, then baptism can be both necessary (i.e. normative) and unnecessary (a *necessitas non absoluta*) at the same time. And yet, there remains an assumption that in order for baptism to take part in the drama of redemption it must serve an instrumental role.³⁴ The principle behind this presupposition is difficult to decipher and while a missing distinction between the "how" and "when" of grace reception is certainly a contender (for such a conflation commits baptism to an instrumental function in conversion), without further evidence, it is impossible to favor it over competing theories.³⁵

Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012); Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans 2nd Edition* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

³⁰ For Paul's soteriological use of baptism in Romans 6, see Moo, *Romans*, 378-401. For a sacramental reading of Galatians 3:26-27, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 146-160. For baptismal allusions in Ephesians 2:8-9, see Jack Cottrell, *Baptism*, 141-143.

³¹ John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 318. Miley's minimal textual support is similar to Grudem's: Rom 3:21-26; 4:3, 23-25; Gal 3:24. A similar confidence is perhaps present in James Petigru Boice, (*Abstract of Systematic Theology* [Louisville: SBT Press, 2013], 363) who merely asserts that the scriptures teach salvation at the moment of faith.

³² See, e.g. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 981-982. See also Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology Volume 3 Spirit-Given Life: God's People, Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 285; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 784-785.

³³ For it is only when a condition has absolute necessity that exceptions (like the unimmersed thief) serve as counterexamples.

³⁴ Even if baptism functions as an initiating instrument, it is not clear that it would share faith's absolute necessity. While allegiance (i.e. faith) is universally required in a king/subject relationship, can the same be said of its public profession (i.e. baptism)?

³⁵ Another possible explanation for this default mindset is a failure to distinguish Roman-Catholic sacramentalism (which affirms baptism's *necessitas medii*) from other expressions of it (which do not). In addition, there has been considerable confusion within the Stone-Campbell movement concerning the requirement of baptism. Absolutist views have dominated and produced strained readings which mirror those of their exegetical counterparts. Such includes ingenious attempts at reconciling Acts's disparate details of conversion. For a recent example of this frustrated finesse, see Jack Cottrell, *Power from on High: What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2007), 237-331.

III. Conclusion

The previous findings (limited as they are) suggest that the non-sequitur has lured some credo-baptists into not only dismissing baptism's sacramental significance, but also distorting the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*. By taking the position that faith is not simply the sole instrument, but also the sole condition, these scholars have transgressed the soteriological traditions of their Protestant predecessors.³⁶ An overstep of orthodoxy not unlike that of the "radical" reformers who, in taking an exclusivistic view of *sola scriptura*, limited theological insight to the scriptures alone (i.e. *solo scriptura*). This was in contrast to the "magisterial" meliorists who considered tradition to be a proper (though uninspired) conspectus of canonical truth (i.e. *prima scriptura*).³⁷ In light of these more recent excesses, the historical doctrine of *sola fide* might best be denominated *prima fide* (i.e. faith as the primary, but not only prerequisite).³⁸

³⁶ While both Luther and Calvin professed the primacy of faith, neither denied baptism's appropriating function. For Luther's view of baptism as the "trusting place", see Jonathon D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 30-31; 75-81. For Calvin's affirmation of baptism's occasional nature, see his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.15.14: "For this analogy or similitude is the surest rule of the sacraments: that we should see spiritual things in physical, as if set before our very eyes...And [God] does not feed our eyes with a mere appearance only, but leads us to the present reality and effectively performs what it symbolizes." See also, *Institutes* 4.14.17: "God therefore truly executes whatever he promises and represents in signs."

³⁷ See Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* 3rd ed. (Hoboken, Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 153-155. See also, N. Clayton Coy, *Prima Scriptura: An Introduction to New Testament Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 130-134; David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 129; Woodrow W. Whidden, "Sola Scriptura, Inerrantist Fundamentalism, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution?" in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35, no. 2, 211-226. Interestingly, the same radicals charged Luther with inconsistency for maintaining the conditionality of baptism despite his advocacy of *sola fide*. See *The Large Catechism* XIII, IV.

³⁸ The noun *fide* is in the ablative case and it therefore speaks of faith being the sole instrument ("by faith alone"), not the sole condition. Technically, then, no clarification is needed. The exclusivist view, however, may be better represented by the nominative case, *fides* (i.e. *sola fides*: a faith which is alone).