

Baptism: Changing the Method, Losing the Meaning

By Larry and June Acheson

I was raised by very loving parents in a home where the Bible was considered the most important book in the house, yet, as is the case in many homes, it was also among the least-read books. I grew up believing our church had all the right answers and that membership constituted my assurance that I had eternal life unless, of course, I committed some really heinous sins. I'm not sure if this belief was instilled in me by my family or if it was some gross misperception that I picked up somewhere. Anyway, I was persuaded that my church had all the right answers, and that the pastor knew and taught the Bible accurately.

That perception came to an abrupt halt shortly after meeting June (back in 1977), who invited me to attend Bible studies with her at the Campus Students for Christ house, which was located off-campus at Western Illinois University. Not only were the students and the ministry director some of the nicest people I have ever met, but they were genuinely concerned about me and my salvation. That is why one evening, after the Bible study had concluded, some of them asked me if I had been baptized. I'm not even certain I remember who it was that first asked me that question, but whoever that person was, he or she was the catalyst that jump-started me on my road of truth-seeking. You can read more about that particular conversation in the letter that follows.

Having been sprinkled at an early age in my life, the jolt of learning that sprinkling is not and never was a valid form of baptism led me to question virtually everything I had ever been taught.

Over the years since that polarizing experience, I have read various attempts to justify "sprinkling," under the guise of "infant baptism." Since baptism in its original form could mean nothing more than "immersion," the mere notion of equating "sprinkling" with "baptism," in and of itself, offers insight into the fact that it is a false doctrine invented by uninspired men. Back in 1997, twenty years after my initial exposure to the issue of sprinkling versus immersion, I read an article entitled "In Defense of Infant Baptism," which appeared in the Spring 1997 issue of *Issues, Etc.*, a magazine published by Lutherans. In fact, the entire issue of that magazine was dedicated to addressing "infant baptism." What follows is the letter I wrote to the author, Dan Matzat, who also happened to be the editor. I support reading both sides to the issue, so for those who would like to read the articles found in that particular issue of *Issues, Etc.*, you may click [here](#).⁸ I then invite you to read my response, which, by the way, has yet to be answered by Mr. Matzat.

⁸Please be patient for this download, it is a very large file.

1416 Fairfield Drive
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April 5, 1998

Issues, Etc.
c/o Don Matzat
85 Founders Lane
St. Louis, Missouri 63105

Dear Don,

My name is Larry Acheson, and I was apparently put on your mailing list as a result of having requested the Spring, 1997 issue of *Issues, Etc.* in which you and other writers addressed the controversy of infant baptism. I requested that article after hearing its being offered on a radio program. I sensed from the way in which it was advertised, your article would be written in support of infant baptism, and since we are counseled to “prove all things,” I decided to at least check it out.

My parents decided that I should be baptized when I reached the age of 12. They took me to the front of the church where the minister waited. He offered up some words of praise and encouragement, then dipped his hands into a fancy bowl. He promptly transferred those wet hands to my head and uttered the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!” Even at such a late age, I did not understand why I went through that ceremony that day. What did it mean?

Years later, I abandoned the faith in which my parents raised me. Influenced by the friends I chose, coupled with the university environment to which I was exposed, not to mention the evolutionist teachings so prevalent in our schools, I found myself not really believing in a Creator. Shortly before graduating from college, however, I met the woman who is now my wife. She, as well as some of her friends, tried to persuade me to trust in our Heavenly Father and His Son. I attended their Tuesday night Bible Study once in a while, and at one of those sessions someone asked me if I had been baptized. I replied, “Yes, I have.”

Somehow, they must have discerned that the decision for me to be baptized was not one that I made on my own, for someone asked, “When we say ‘baptized,’ we mean ‘Have you been sprinkled or immersed?’”

“It doesn’t matter whether anyone has been sprinkled or immersed,” I replied.

“According to the Bible, it *does* matter,” I was told.

“Well, all I know is I was sprinkled, and the preacher who did it knows the Bible.”

They were persistent, however, and at length offered to loan me this thing called a *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* that they told me would reveal the true, intended meaning of the words “baptize” and “baptism.” They then showed me how to use it. I am the type of person who is willing to admit defeat when it comes down to what is right and what is wrong. The following Tuesday night I brought back their concordance and announced that I wanted to be immersed.

By the very definition offered by *Strong's*, I was not actually baptized at the age of 12. I was “rhantized” (word #4472 in *Strong's*)! According to *Strong's*, the word “baptize” (word #907) properly means “to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet).” When I was “rhantized,” only my *hair* became wet.

In the Spring 1997 issue, you wrote an article entitled “In Defense of Infant Baptism.” On page 3 you wrote, “The fact of the matter is that those who reject and even disdain the Baptism of infants and promote a “Believer's Baptism” are in the minority and actually out-of-step with the historic position of the early Christian Church.” It may be true, Mr. Matzat, that those of my persuasion are in the minority, but I would counter by asking you if truth is decided by a majority vote. Does having more people on “your side” make your side “more correct”? Let's consider the case of Elijah the prophet. He was certainly in the minority when it came to the worship of Yahweh. He was all by himself that day on Mt. Carmel. He exclaimed, “I, I only, remain a prophet of Yahweh, but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men” (I Kings 18:22). Whose side would *you* have been on that day, Mr. Matzat? The one with the majority vote? Your cause would not have succeeded. Therefore, this “minority” thing you brought up is *non sequitor* in the eyes of our Heavenly Father.

As for the “historic position of the early Christian Church,” your co-author, Dennis Kastens, went to considerable lengths to demonstrate that from an early time in history infant baptism was accepted and expected. In fact, he quoted from the Sixteenth Council of Carthage, held in 418: “If any man says that newborn children need not be baptized . . . let him be anathema.” It is clear from the ellipsis in the preceding quote that Mr. Kastens left out some words. I personally appreciate documentation of quoted material, so I would be interested in knowing where I could obtain a copy of the minutes of that Sixteenth Council of Carthage, especially to find out what words Mr. Kastens left out! Notwithstanding, it certainly appears from his article that infant baptism has its roots in what is known as the “early Church.” But does this support what was practiced by the early believers of the Apostle Paul's day?

The Apostle Paul warned the elders of Ephesus, saying, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). Could it be that non-Spirit-led men made the decision to start baptizing (actually “rhantizing”) infants after Paul's death? Let's see!

Whenever I read biased literature, I know I need to search through other resources that were written by unbiased researchers in order to come to the most accurate conclusion. According to the resources made available to me, your “historic position of the early Christian Church” does not go back far enough. The following is taken from the *Encyclopedia International*, volume 2, 1972, by Grolier Incorporated, New York, page 378, article “Baptism”:

“The original mode of baptism was by immersion of the entire body in water, but a widely accepted method since the 2nd century has been baptism by affusion. Before baptism a mature candidate must make a formal renunciation of his sins and a

confession of his faith in Christ, and in administering the sacrament the minister pronounces over the candidate the name of the Trinity. In most churches the children of believing parents may be baptized in infancy; but since the Reformation, Protestant Christians of the Anabaptist tradition have rejected the baptism of infants as unwarranted by the teaching of the New Testament.”

According to this reference, immersion preceded the practice of substituting the act of sprinkling, which is commonly done in the case of infants. I am not aware of any cases in which infants are immersed in water. Therefore, if history is an important factor, we must discount the practice of affusion. The following additional information comes from the *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed., J. D. Douglas, organizing editor, 1982, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, page 122:

“If divine judgment could be likened to a stream of God’s fiery breath (=Spirit—same word in Hebrew and Greek), then the Coming One’s ministry of judgment could appropriately be likened to an immersion in that stream. Those who submitted themselves to an act symbolizing that judgment, as an expression of their repentance in face of that judgment, would find it a judgment that purified and cleansed. Those who refused John’s baptism and refused to repent would experience the Coming One’s ‘baptism’ in all its fierceness and, like the barren trees and the chaff, would be burnt up by it (Mt. 3:10-12).”

On the following page we read information concerning infant baptism:

“Was *infant baptism* practised within 1st-century Christianity? There are no direct references to infant baptism in the NT, but the possibility of there being children within the households baptized in Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8; and I Cor. 1:16 cannot be finally excluded. That infants of believers are part of the household of faith can readily be maintained on the basis of I Cor. 7:14, not to mention Mk. 10:13-16. On the other hand, in Gal. 3 Paul specifically argues that membership of Christ does not derive from physical descent or depend on a ritual act (circumcision), but comes through faith and is dependent on nothing other than faith and on the gift of the Spirit received through faith.

“In short, the more baptism is seen as the expression of the baptisand’s faith, the less easy is it to hold to infant baptism. Whereas the more baptism is seen as the expression of divine grace, the easier is it to argue for infant baptism. Either way, Christians should beware of overvaluing baptism in the way that the Judaizers overvalued circumcision.”

According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1981, by Fleming H. Revell Company, page 96:

“I. BAPTISMA (βαπτισμα), baptism, consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from *bapto* to dip), is used...”

According to *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by Joseph Henry Thayer, D.D., 1981, Hendrickson Publishers, p. 94, the word translated “baptism” in its original sense signifies *immersion*:

“**baptisma**, -toj, to(baptiŋw), a word peculiar to N. T. and eccl. writ.,
immersion, submersion;”

We thus see that “baptism” in its original sense meant “immersion.” It is my understanding that whenever a Lutheran minister “baptizes” an infant, he in fact does **not** immerse the child, thus deviating from the original intent and meaning of that word.

Years ago, before I had a heart that was bent on checking things out to make certain they were factual, I would have read your Spring, 1997 issue of *Issues, Etc.*, and would have come away satisfied that my parents brought me up in a church that practiced the faith of the early believers. I would have appreciated your article, and may even have dropped you a line to express gratitude for confirming that what my parents taught me is Scripturally sound. However, I have since learned of how the heart of a biased man beats. Such a man will not present his argument from all angles. He will leave out pertinent information that might sway his readers the other way. This is, sadly, what I discern to be the case with your combined articles.

Please don't get me wrong. I acknowledge that all men are, for the most part, biased. I am biased in my belief that our Creator does not sanction water baptism for infants. What I must attempt to do, then, is present my case in as unbiased a fashion as possible. I do not doubt that my bias will show on many occasions, but I must do all I can to present all the possibilities in such a way as to allow the unbiased reader to formulate the correct conclusion. What I am trying to say, in as polite a way as I can, is that your articles left out some key passages of Scripture and key points that the unbiased reader has a right to review before drawing his final conclusion. I will list them below:

- The original meaning of the word “baptism.” I used to think that baptism could mean “sprinkle,” “immerse,” “pour,” ...whatever a person felt was best for him/her. I have already shown you the original meaning of this word, and “sprinkle” is not it!
- Matthew 3:16 demonstrates how our Messiah was baptized. He literally “went up at once from the water” (from *The Interlinear Bible*, Jay P. Green, Sr., General Editor and Translator, 1985, Hendrickson Publishers pp. 738-739). In my attempt to fight against immersion as being the only valid form of baptism, this is the one verse I could not circumvent. This clearly portrays how Yeshua was baptized. He died for me! Wow! If immersion was good enough for the Man who gave His life for the world, then it's good enough for me! (Note: In my first sentence in this paragraph, I could just as accurately have written, “Matthew 3:16 demonstrates how our Messiah was **immersed**.” The true meaning of “baptism” has already been ascertained and documented by numerous references.)
- Romans 6:3-4. This passage is so crucial to a defense of baptism by immersion that it is virtually unthinkable that you would not have at least devoted some space to answering the logic of those of my persuasion. Nevertheless, you and your fellow writers either ignored Romans 6:3-4 or else deemed it unworthy of comment. I find it worthy of comment! To begin with, I will display this passage below:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Yeshua Messiah were baptized into His death?

Therefore we are **buried with Him by baptism** into death: that like as Messiah was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Paul in this passage depicts baptism [immersion] as symbolizing a **burial**. I am unable to comprehend how the act of sprinkling can convey this symbolism. But maybe my inability to comprehend

demonstrates my ignorance in this matter. I feel that such might be your conclusion. Therefore, I have sought out a few commentaries to see if maybe I am missing something. Apparently, I am not. Even the commentators share my interpretation of this passage. The interpretation itself is not difficult. Baptism by immersion requires that one be “buried” under the water. The act of sprinkling does not. But let’s read how Adam Clarke in his book *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*, 1985, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, MO, page 1,050, views this passage:

“4. *We are buried with him by baptism into death.* It is probable that the apostle here alludes to the mode of administering baptism by immersion, the whole body being put under the water, which seemed to say, The man is drowned, is dead; and when he came up out of the water, he seemed to have a resurrection to life. The man is risen again; he is alive!”

This commentator understands Paul to be describing baptism in terms of there being an *immersion* involved. We also have an *NIV Study Bible* that offers short comments to various passages. A comment is offered in reference to Romans 6:3-4, and is displayed below:

“**6:3-4** The when and how of the Christian’s death to sin. In NT times baptism so closely followed conversion that the two were considered part of one event (see Ac 2:38 and note). So although baptism is not a means by which we enter into a vital faith relationship with Jesus Christ, it is closely associated with faith.”

This commentary most definitely defies the teachings promoted in your article. In the New Testament immersion was the only recognized form of baptism. In other words, Baptism = Immersion. Once converted, the new believer had to DO something to demonstrate that he would follow through on his commitment to live His life in obedience to the Father as opposed to doing things his own way. Mr. Richard Shuta, in his article entitled “Baptism and Faith: Just Whose Work Is It?”, brought up the story of the Syrian General Naaman on page 11. It was Naaman who dipped himself in the Jordan River seven times in obedience to Elisha’s command, which then healed him of his leprosy. Mr. Shuta mentioned, “The Jordan River did not have any power to normally cure leprosy but the command to the General to go into the water, on the basis of God’s command and promise, produced the cleansing result.”

Need I inform Mr. Shuta that if Naaman had disobeyed the command to dip himself in the Jordan River, he would not have been healed? It was something that Naaman had to DO. Of course, I have to be careful whenever I use words such as “Do.” This implies action on the part of the believer. And you know what that means! WORK! I am surprised that Mr. Shuta did not criticize Naaman for doing this “work.” Should not Naaman have had faith that the waters of the Jordan would heal him? And shouldn’t he have stopped right there? To act upon that faith certainly appears to be a *work*, something that Mr. Shuta warned us against on pages 9-10 of his article.

On those pages, he wrote, “Faith, our reception of God’s gift and response to His Word is itself the work of God, born out of His self-giving love. To affirm otherwise would be to make the human response a ‘work’ meriting salvation. Such an affirmation is a direct contradiction of the nature of saving grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). After all, it is the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep; it is not the sheep who are searching for the shepherd. Salvation, therefore, is not dependent on the subjective response of the

person.” You know, it sounds so nice to say that faith, which is our reception of our Heavenly Father’s gift and our response to His Word — that this faith is itself the work of Yahweh born out of His self-giving love. I have to agree with this summation of faith. But what if we receive our Heavenly Father’s gift, and then choose to not respond? What if Naaman had chosen to not respond? What if he had said, “I’ll take your gift of healing, but I’m not setting foot in the Jordan River!”?

Unfortunately, whenever one speaks of obedience to the Heavenly Father these days, the first response is that of warning against relying upon works! I fear that Naaman, had he lived in the 1990’s, would have encountered a plethora of preachers warning him against dipping in the Jordan River. He would have been accused of relying on *works* for his healing instead of faith.

By the way, in the Septuagint, the Greek word used for “dipped” in the story of General Naaman is the word *baptisma*, or “baptize, i.e., immerse.”

Baptism is a response to a conviction that we cannot save ourselves. Instead of regarding our view that only adults should be baptized as reflecting a view based on works, you should regard it as a response to the newfound conviction that, contrary to what we thought before, we cannot save ourselves. This is a thought process that no infant can possibly experience! It is only after we have reached maturity ... when we have experienced the sad consequences of sin ... when we realize the need for grace ... *that* is when we can truly turn to the Almighty with sincerity of heart, asking for that grace and offering him our commitment to henceforth walk in newness of life. To demonstrate to Him that we pledge to rely on Him and His instructions for how we should live our lives, we request baptism. On page 9 of Richard Shuta’s article, he writes,

“What is the relationship between faith and Baptism? Those who advocate only a ‘Believer’s Baptism’ (and therefore limited to adults) understand Baptism as an outward sign of an inward faith that is in existence *prior to* coming to Baptism. To those who hold this view, emphasis falls upon both Baptism and faith as man’s act.”

Mr. Shuta then goes on to explain why he feels the above view should not be the emphasis, and of how it is “too narrow” and even “dangerous.” Is he correct? Well, to answer that question requires my bringing up yet ANOTHER significantly relevant passage of Scripture that you and your fellow authors did not deem worthy of note in your magazine.

- I Peter 3:21. Oh, I Peter 3:21 is *mentioned*, all right! But only in passing! Mr. Shuta, on page 10, wrote:

“When Peter wrote to a group of Christians who probably were about to be baptized or had just been baptized, he did not write, ‘Faith saves you,’ but rather ‘Baptism...saves you’ (I Peter 3:21).”

This is the extent of Mr. Shuta’s commentary on I Peter 3:21. Perhaps we would do well to examine that verse a little more closely! It is displayed below:

The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward Yahweh,) by the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah;

Peter in this verse informs us that baptism is done in response to something. In response to what? Answer: A good conscience toward our Creator! You could interpret this verse as telling us that baptism is done as an outward sign of an inward commitment. This is what I believe Peter meant in this passage, and this is what I believe Mr. Shuta **criticized** on page 9 of your magazine. Mr. Shuta effectively **criticized Peter** for teaching the believers that baptism is the response (an outward, visible sign) of an inward faith (reception of Yahweh's gift and response to His Word). No wonder he left that part of I Peter 3:21 out of his article! An infant cannot respond to a good conscience toward our Creator. Those who promote infant baptism would not want to have to deal with the Scriptural teaching that one is baptized in response to a good conscience because that would require a decision, something an infant is not capable of doing.

Well, once again, if it were just me making these comments, the average person would naturally dismiss them solely on the basis of the fact that I do not have the title "Dr." to precede my name like Mr. Shuta does. I therefore submit to you the following commentary as found in the *NIV Study Bible*, page 1,893:

"pledge of a good conscience toward God. The act of baptism is a commitment on the part of the believer in all good conscience to make sure that what baptism symbolizes will become a reality in his life."

I do not think I could have stated this better myself! I regard baptism as a commitment on the part of the believer in all good conscience to start doing things Yahweh's Way from here on out, not his way (as he had been doing). All of us should reach a certain point in our lives wherein we recognize that we are helpless to save ourselves. We need the salvation of Yahweh made possible for us by the gift of His Son Yeshua the Messiah. Yeshua told us that not everyone who calls upon Him will be saved, but he that doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven (Matthew 7:21). In order to receive Yahweh's gift, we have to do His will. We have to do things His way, not our way. Before I was immersed, I prayed to Yahweh to forgive me for all the wrongs I had done, and to give me strength to overcome sin so I can do things His way from here on out. As my pledge to Him that I am now accepting responsibility for either obeying Him or disobeying Him, I was immersed. My "old man" was buried, and I arose in newness of life — not immune to sin, but determined to not allow sin to rule my life as it had been up to that point. And just as I arose from that watery grave, so I am reminded of Yeshua's resurrection (Romans 6:4). And I am further reminded that, Yahweh-willing, I will also one day be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5). Somehow those verses lose their meaning and intensity when we teach that they can be references to infants as well as adults. It is most difficult to understand how an infant can have an answer of a good conscience toward Yahweh as presented in I Peter 3:21!

I do not mean to run this into the ground, but I would also like to include one more commentary's explanation of I Peter 3:21. The following is taken from page 1,559 of *The International Bible Commentary*, gen. editor F. F. Bruce, 1986, Marshall Pickering/Zondervan:

*"The essence of baptism is shown not to consist in the cleansing of the body, but in the soul's response to God. **Pledge** is not easy to translate. It probably means the clause in a contract containing a formal question to and consent of the parties contracting and thus signifies 'a pledge to God proceeding from a good conscience'. The response usually required of a candidate prior to baptism may have suggested the statement. Baptism is thus the glad and thankful confession to God that through*

the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer rejoices in a cleansed conscience.”

The underlined words above all depict actions/responses of believers both prior to and after baptism. The entire paragraph above (as well as I Peter 3:21) loses its meaning if the person getting baptized is an infant. An infant is not capable of giving a response drawn from a good conscience towards Yahweh. An infant is not capable of giving a glad and thankful confession to Yahweh, nor can he rejoice in a cleansed conscience. I am therefore left to reject infant baptism as being not only unscriptural, but also anti-scriptural. It requires a change in the method of baptism, and anytime you *change the method* in which something is intended to be done, you simultaneously *lose the meaning*. That is what folks like you, who have apparently been led down the same path as Martin Luther, Origen, and Augustine. It is unclear as to how Mr. Kastens, in his article “Infant Baptism in Early Church History” arrives at the conclusion that Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus supported infant baptism since he did not provide any specific quotes documenting his statements to that effect. I can see where one might perceive his quote from Irenaeus to be in support of infant baptism, yet I, like Irenaeus, believe that Yeshua “came to save all through means of Himself — all, I say, who through Him are born again to Yahweh — infants and children, boys and youth, and old men.” Does Irenaeus state here that infants should be baptized? No. Men only interpret his words as such. Regardless, I can only regard the words of these men in light of how they treat our Creator’s Word. His Word must have preeminence over their interpretations of it, and I personally believe that if Martin Luther taught infant baptism, then he was mistaken in his interpretation of Yahweh’s Word and Yahweh’s intentions.

I cannot close this lengthy letter without at least a brief response to your article, Mr. Matzat. On page 6, you present your assessment of people involved in what you term *synergism*:

“...to claim that a person must reach the ‘age of reason’ or the ‘age of accountability’ before receiving Baptism is to claim that there is something within the person that is able to cooperate with the grace of God. This is called *synergism*, a theological perversion that places man into a cooperative relationship with God in the salvation process.”

Well, Mr. Matzat, I guess I am **guilty as charged!** I guess I am a *synergist*, as I wholly support cooperating with the grace of Yahweh! What a shame that you consider cooperating with Yahweh to be a “theological perversion.” I need to ask you, though: What term to you apply to people such as yourself, who obviously believe in the opposite of *synergism*? The definition of that term must read, “...a theological ethicality that places man into an uncooperative relationship with our Creator in the salvation process.” No wonder you and I are at such odds on this issue!

To me, a cooperative relationship with our Creator means understanding that He makes the rules, and then cooperating with Him in compliance with those rules because He’s the “boss.” Does my attempt to cooperate with Him make me any better than anyone else? No, because we’re ALL sinners and have fallen short of His majesty. Just as there is something within me that is able to cooperate with His mercy, there is also something within me that is uncooperative. That is what makes His pardon so wonderful — that He shows compassion on even those who fall short. But for me to be deliberately uncooperative, i.e., *unsynergistic*, would place me in the category of those folks described in Hebrews 10:26-27:

For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,
But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

When I think of “cooperative,” I think of “obedience.” When I think of “uncooperative,” I think of “disobedience,” or “sin.” For you to define *synergism* as being a cooperative relationship with our Creator in the salvation process, and then labeling that relationship as a “theological perversion” is nothing short of shameful. Shame on you for presenting a cooperative relationship with Yahweh as being a “theological perversion.” If cooperation with Yahweh = synergism, then I am PROUD to be synergistic! I would rather be *synergistic* than *sinnergistic* ANY DAY!!

I will close this letter with one last verse. I believe that the Apostle James would have a lot to say to you regarding your *sinnergistic* views, i.e. that “faith is a miraculous gift of God worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit without human cooperation” (p. 7). You make it sound as if, as stubborn and rebellious as mankind is, faith “just comes” and takes over — no cooperation necessary! Let’s see what James has to say about this mentality:

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?
Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?
And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, ‘Abraham believed Yahweh, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness’: and he was called the Friend of Yahweh.
You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. — James 2:20-24

Abraham cooperated with Yahweh. I don’t believe he did so with the thought (in the back of his mind) that this cooperation would bring him salvation. Neither should that be our mentality. As Yeshua said in Luke 17:10, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” Yahweh’s merciful pardon has always been there for us; it’s just that sometimes it takes us a lifetime to recognize it. Once we discern who the “boss” is, faith comes. At least that’s the way it was for me. Once I came to the dramatic realization that there is a Creator, I knew that the next question I needed answered was, “What does He want me to do?” He answers that question for all of us in His Word. The only problem is that all of us come up with different interpretations of His answers. But for me to find out what He wants me to do, and then have some preacher tell me, “That’s okay, He doesn’t really want you to cooperate anyway — just be strong in the Faith!”, this is a major contradiction/corruption of His Word. I prefer to go by the hymn that says, “TRUST AND OBEY.” You can’t go wrong by doing what His Word says to do.

My purpose in writing you this lengthy treatise centers around your latest letter requesting financial support. Certainly you can understand that, based upon the huge chasm separating us, we will have to direct our financial support to areas which we feel are more in line with carrying out the wishes of our Heavenly Father. Based upon my understanding of your views, you would consider me to be what today’s society terms a “legalist.” You would most likely prefer to not have one of my kind on your mailing list. I would suggest that you do indeed remove my name from your mailing list unless you are intent on sincerely abiding by the motto at the bottom of your letter: “Defending the faith . . . teaching the truth!” It is on the faint hope that you in fact choose to live by those words that I have chosen to open up the line of communication between us.

My closing admonition for you, Mr. Matzat, is a reminder that when you change the method of anything, you lose the meaning. Those of your persuasion, concerning baptism, have lost the meaning. I urge you to reconsider your stance.

Sincerely,

Larry Acheson

P. S. It has occurred to me that you may be curious as to why I obviously prefer referring to our Creator as *Yahweh* and His Son as *Yeshua*. For this reason I am enclosing a booklet that my wife and I put together recently. If you can find the time to read it, I believe you will at least understand our position. Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

LA: Enc