

Come, Ye Who Bow to Sovereign Grace

St. 1–2, 4–5: *Maria De Fleury (1773–1791)*; St. 3: *Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)*

Come, ye who bow to sovereign grace,
Record Immanuel's love;
Join in a song of noble praise
To him who reigns above.

Once in the gloomy grave he lay,
But, by his rising power,
He bore the gates of death away;
Hail, mighty Conqueror!

Buried with him beneath this flood,
We glory in his death:
We own our great incarnate God,
And rise with him by faith.

As saints of old confessed his Name
In Jordan's flowing tide,
So we adore the stricken Lamb,
Renouncing all beside.

No trust in water do we place,
'Tis but an outward sign;
The great reality is grace,
The fountain blood divine.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Does Baptism Wash Away Sins?

Kevin T. Bauder

The Texas morning was already warm and getting warmer. A friend had stopped by just to say *hello*, and I asked him how he intended to spend what promised to be a hot forenoon. He replied, "I'm going to go to the hardware and buy some ice cream."

Looking at him quizzically I said, "I didn't know you could buy ice cream at the hardware."

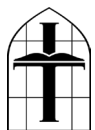
He responded, "No. First I'm going to the hardware. Then I'm going to buy some ice cream. Two distinct activities."

This conversation hinges upon a semantic ambiguity: does buying ice cream coordinate with going to the hardware, or is it subordinated to it? Grammar does not answer the question or the ambiguity would not exist. Either could be the case.

A slightly more complicated instance occurs in Acts 22:16. The passage occurs as part of Paul's personal testimony. He relates how Ananias has been sent to him in Damascus. Ananias foretells the ministry that God has planned for Paul, and then says, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (NKJV).

People who believe in baptismal regeneration, including those in the Stone-Campbell movement, appeal to this text as evidence that baptism washes away sins. Since the verbs "be baptized" and "wash away your sins" are joined by *and*, these people assume that the washing must be joined to the baptism. Part of this viewpoint is shared by Jack Cottrell, who posits that "The two main verbs in the sentence, which are imperatives, are 'get yourself baptized AND [kai] wash away your sins.' They are joined with kai into a single event."

This reading of the text is possible, just as it was possible for me to understand my friend to be saying that he would be buying his ice cream at the hardware. Simply because it is possible, however, does not make the reading necessary. Being baptized and washing away sins may be distinct events.



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Acts 22:16 contains two finite verbs, both of which are in the middle voice. English doesn't have a middle voice, only an active (in which the subject is acting) and a passive (in which the subject is being acted upon). In the middle voice the subject is acting upon itself or in its own interest. These middle verbs are not easy to translate in Acts 22:16. Nevertheless, Ananias is not saying "be baptized" and "wash away your sins;" he is saying something more like "get yourself baptized" and "get your sins washed away."

Each of the two verbs is joined to an aorist participle. The function of the aorist participle is to specify an action that is antecedent to the leading verb. The first participle is "having got up," and the second is "having called upon the name of the Lord." Each of these participles further defines the action of its main verb: "*Having got up, get yourself baptized,*" and, "*get your sins washed away, having called upon the name of the Lord.*"

What is the relationship between Paul getting baptized and getting his sins washed away? The two verbs are joined with the coordinating conjunction *kai*, which can be translated *and* or *also*. Normally this conjunction coordinates, but the semantic effect is sometimes subordination. In other words, the verse is ambiguous. It could be read in such a way that baptism produces or leads to washing away sins. It could also be read in such a way that baptism and washing away sins are distinct acts, both of which are equally commanded.

One consideration does tilt the balance, however, making the second reading more probable than the first. That consideration is the presence of the participles. The participles are already defining actions that are subordinated to each main verb. If Ananias's intention had been to subordinate washing away sins to baptism, then he could very well have used a similar construction. The fact that he did not indicates that he most likely wanted to envision the baptizing and the washing as acts that were distinct rather than joined.

In other words, Cottrell is probably mistaken when he says that *kai* (and) joins these two verbs into a single event. He is certainly mistaken if he thinks that is the only thing that *kai* can be doing. It is possible, and I think probable, that *kai* is actually coordinating to distinct events. If that is so, then the verse would be translated something like this: "And why are you waiting? Having risen up, get yourself baptized; also, get your sins washed away, having called upon the name of the Lord."

To be clear, Acts 22:16 is not a proof text *against* baptismal regeneration. It does not *deny* that baptism washes away sins. On the other hand, it does not clearly *affirm* that baptism washes away sins, either. It is semantically ambiguous. It is probably not addressing either the sequential order of baptism and forgiveness or their order of dependence. It is most likely juxtaposing

them as two activities that Paul was responsible to complete in the immediate future.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
