

Gospel Gleaner

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The Gospel Gleaner

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Inside this Issue

Andy Erwin

The July–August issue of the *Gospel Gleaner* consists of articles primarily intending to encourage Christians to keep the faith and stand strong in the Lord. We have articles from a few who write regularly for the paper and articles from first-time writers.

In this issue we have Cameron Miller writing. Cameron is interning with West Fayetteville over the summer. He is a Bible major at Freed-Hardeman University as well.

Van Sprague is the general manager for the International Gospel Hour. He is also being published for the first time in the *Gleaner*.

Heath Stapleton has labored for many years with the Brown Trail School of Preaching. We are glad to have him writing for the first time in the *Gleaner*.

Former Tennessee State Representative and a fine gospel preacher from Memphis, John DeBerry is also being published for the first time in the *Gleaner*. Thank you for your contributions to the paper!

We pray this issue will help every reader grow in God's grace and knowledge. May we each be encouraged to stand strongly for the cause of the Lord, His word, and His church!

Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ

Tom McLemore

Are you a member of the church of Christ? If so, how would you respond if someone asked you, “Why are you a member of the church of Christ?” Would your response be the truth according to the New Testament? I hope that reading this article will enable you to examine your understanding of this most important matter.

Why am I a member of the church of Christ? In reality, four questions must be asked and answered before one can know the answer to this question.

WHAT is a member of the church of Christ? A member of the church of Christ is one who has been saved by Christ (Acts 2:47). Since this is true, ALL individuals who have been saved by Christ are also members of the church of Christ. That is why the church of Christ is not, and cannot be, a denomination. By its very nature, a denomination does not, and cannot, claim that all who have been saved by Christ are in it! That is also why no denomination can be the church of Christ. All those who have been saved are members of the church of Christ. On the other hand, since, by definition, the church of Christ is those who have been saved by Christ, it is impossible for anyone who has been saved not to be a member of the church of Christ!

WHO is RESPONSIBLE for one being a member of the church of

Christ? The Lord does both the saving and the adding (Acts 2:47). The LORD adds persons to HIS church and to HIS church ONLY (Matthew 16:18). The Lord Himself is the Savior of those who are members of His church, and He obtained those who are members of His church by His own blood (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 20:28). The Lord does not add ANYONE to ANY denomination.

Membership in the church of Christ is not the result of a choice of the individual. (Contrast denominationalism’s “Join the church of your choice.”) Acts 2:47 does NOT say, “Those who were being saved added themselves day by day to their number.” Why I am a member of the church of Christ does not mean why I chose the church of Christ instead of any other church.

WHEN does one become a member of the church of Christ? It is not BEFORE one is saved that one becomes a member of the church of Christ. Acts 2:47 does NOT say, “The Lord was saving those who had been added to their number.” (This is the view of Catholicism, viz., one is saved as the result of church membership.)

It is not AFTER one is saved that one becomes a member of the church of Christ. Acts 2:47 does NOT say, “The Lord added to their number day by day those who already had been saved.” (This is denominationalism’s

view of church membership, viz., “Be saved, and then join a church.”)

Acts 2:47 teaches that one becomes a member of the church of Christ AS one is being saved. Acts 2:47 says, “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Grammatically, “were being saved” (Greek present participle) is occurring at the same time as “added” (Greek aorist indicative). Therefore, Acts 2:47 affirms that AS the Lord saves, He adds; AS the Lord adds, He saves...AS one is being saved, one is being added by the Lord; AS one is being added by the Lord, one is being saved. There is no distinction in time between being saved and being added.

So then, HOW does one become a member of the church of Christ? According to Acts 2:47, one becomes a member of the church of Christ BY being saved by Christ. “Why am I a member of the church of Christ?” really means, “Under what conditions was I SAVED by Christ?” Acts 2:36-41 gives the answer:

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to

you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves [more accurately, “Be saved” (aorist passive imperative)–tm] from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

BY responding to the gospel as Acts 2:36-41 describes, I became a member of the church of Christ. AS I was responding and being saved by Christ, the Lord was adding me to His church. That is why I am a member of the church of Christ. The same goes for every other individual who is a member of the church of Christ. If you responded in the same manner, Christ was saving you and adding you to His church as you were responding (Acts 2:47). Therefore, if you are asked why you are a member of the church of Christ, Acts 2:47 provides the fundamental answer.

If you are a member of the church of Christ, I hope this study has helped you to understand more clearly why you are a member. If you are not a member of the church of Christ, now you know why you are not yet a member—it is because you have not yet been saved by Christ (Acts 2:47). Be saved (Acts 2:40, 41)!



Churches of Christ in Old Europe

Heath Stapleton

In Europe, some evidence goes all the way back to the 11th century of congregations and brotherhoods of believers returning to the Bible and baptizing adults for the remission of sins. Some of these groups were derogatorily called Waldensians, Lollards, and Pelagians. These groups opposed the Catholic church, formed autonomous congregations, baptized for the remission of sins, and desired to return to the Bible for their authority. These groups continued to grow in numbers throughout the 14th-16th centuries, primarily in central and southern England.

Records exist of groups calling themselves “churches of Christ” in London in the early 1500s. In 1532, a preacher named James Bainham, from the Bow Lane Church of Christ in London, was tortured and killed for preaching the gospel and the need for people to repent and be baptized. In the early 1600s, there was a group of New Testament believers from Amsterdam who moved to London and started the New Gate Church of Christ. Their preacher’s name was John Morton, and they were an autonomous congregation that had elders and baptized for the remission of sins. In the 1620s, there were at least 12 restoration congregations around the London area. In 1669, during the reign of Charles II, it is reported there were eight churches of

Christ that taught immersion for the remission of sins, partook of the Lord’s Supper, and had qualified elders and deacons.

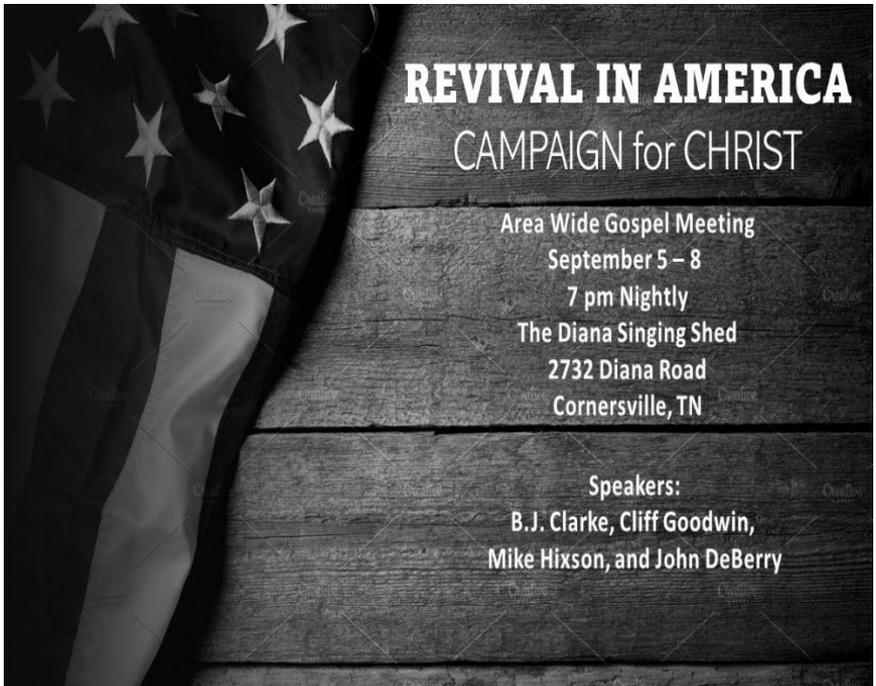
Then outside of England, there were churches of Christ as well. In 1735, a preacher named John Davis preached in the Fife District in Scotland about the need to return to NT Christianity. In 1778, there is a record of a Lord’s church in Glasgow, Scotland...another in North Wales in 1799. In 1804, there was a congregation in Dungannon, Ireland, while the Campbells were still in Ireland. There was another in Tubemore, Ireland, on record from 1807. And one was found in Dublin in 1810.

Dr. Hans Grimm (not the other German Hans Grimm, who wrote *Volk ohne Raum*, which became a political slogan for Naziism) was born in 1899, went to college at 17, heard of the churches of Christ, and started researching the history of the churches of Christ in Central Europe. He wrote about his findings in a book called “Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe.” It is no longer in print; I believe the latest edition is from 1963. But he begins his book by writing, “It has always been a real church of Christ in this world since Pentecost, and this means:

a church believing in faith, repentance, confession and immersion for the remission of sins—a church which worshipped at least the first day of the week, with hymns, prayers, the Lord’s Supper, Bible study and contributions for the saints—a church which worked under the oversight of bishops, deacons, and evangelists—a church—not some isolated seekers, but an organized church, which trusted in the Lord’s promise that ‘the powers of death will never prevail against it.’”

Even though the Baptists would like to pin the existence of the churches of Christ on Alexander Campbell; the reality is that Alexander Campbell was a great man, an amazing scholar with unmatched talents. But, he did not start

the churches of Christ. The Biblical evidence teaches Christ established the church at Pentecost in Acts 2. And the historical evidence suggests that the Lord’s church has been here and there for hundreds of years. It may not have been large in number at times. But, as long as God’s word is here, and as long as there are good and honest hearts who want to return to the Book, they will find their way and God will be glorified! So, they will call us what they want. But all that matters is what God says in the end. And may we continue to restore New Testament Christianity so that we may hear from Him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant....enter into the joy of your Master.”

A poster for a revival campaign. The background is a dark, textured surface with a portion of an American flag (stars and stripes) on the left side. The text is white and centered on the right side.

REVIVAL IN AMERICA
CAMPAIGN for CHRIST

Area Wide Gospel Meeting
September 5 – 8
7 pm Nightly
The Diana Singing Shed
2732 Diana Road
Cornersville, TN

Speakers:
B.J. Clarke, Cliff Goodwin,
Mike Hixson, and John DeBerry

Jesus, the Servant of God

Ronald Bryant

Jesus lived the life of a servant. His service was real. He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He cured those afflicted with leprosy. He healed the lame. He raised the dead. In all that He did, He made no demands, nor did He request praise or tribute. He simply went about doing good – He served. He was the servant of God!

He was one with the Father, He came from the Father, He spoke the words of the Father, He did the will of the Father, and He made the Father known (John 1:1-3, 14, 18). He was “Immanuel,” “God with us” (Matthew 1:23); He was the Son of God (John 3:16-17). Though often dismissed, He was the servant of God!

His purpose for coming was high and holy; He came to give His life a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). In keeping with God’s purpose, He was crucified (Acts 2:23). He was then raised from the dead and was declared to be “the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness” (Romans 1:4). In every aspect He was the servant of God!

Isaiah, the prophet of God, spoke of the “servant of God.” After referencing Him as God’s servant in Isaiah 42 and 50, in Isaiah 53:3-12, he set Him forth as the suffering servant.

The apostle Paul set forth a specific depiction of the Son of God in Philipians 2:6-8:

“Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Many who claim to follow Christ lay claim to power and authority, to rights and positions that are the exact opposite of the character and conduct of Christ.

Declarations such as these are incomparable, and they are compelling. In exacting detail, Jesus spoke of His mission and ministry (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:42-45; John 10:9-18; Luke 19:10). Jesus declared that He had come to serve, not to be served, and that He did so in order to save mankind from sin. His service is the basis of salvation for man. Jesus did not seek glory from men. Nor did He establish or commission positions of power or

pageantry for His followers. He simply did not glory in receiving praise or tribute from men.

In view of His emphasis, and in the character of His life, it is more than disturbing to consider the efforts of those who go to great lengths to glory in their roles as “servants of God.” In His conduct and in His character, Jesus set forth the life and service that was acceptable to God. He set forth in the clearest fashion the character of faith and obedience, of worship and service. His reverence for the Father and His humility in service was real. His life was service and sacrifice.

Many who claim to follow Christ lay claim to power and authority, to rights and positions that are the exact opposite of the character and conduct of Christ. The “religious leaders” of our day focus upon their status and office, upon their prestige and prominence, and readily condemn those that will not bow down to them. The pomp and ceremony that is part and parcel of the religious world is devoid of the character of Christ. The religious leaders call themselves servants of God, but where is the evidence of the character of Christ in their ranks? Who of the religious leaders, in the present day, is the most like Christ? How many members of the local congregations are like Him?

Christ cannot be separated from His character and conduct. While He worked miracles to establish His

identity, the greatest miracle is His person. His words and deeds stand as a harmonious whole, fitting together fully. They stand above all the words and deeds of mere mortals. He claimed to be one with the Father and to make Him known. He is revealed as the sinless Son of God, and He is to be honored as Lord and Christ, the Savior of mankind. He lived and died as the humble and holy Servant of God! He did nothing for show, nor did He seek praise from men. He honored His Father, He went to His Father, and He is now seated at His right hand. He now has the name that is above all other names.

God revealed Himself to mankind in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus now stands as the noblest, purest, and mightiest of all who have ever walked upon the earth. His cross stands as the hope of all mankind; His words are the power of God to save; His example is one of holiness and humility. In and through Him, the past is secured and the future is ruled by hope. All that we desire rests in Him – the Servant of God! He calls His followers to service, not to ceremony or status.



Victory in Jesus

Bradley S. Cobb

Someone runs up to you. “We won! We won! Our team won!” You’re not quite up on who is playing, so you ask, “Who did we beat?”

That’s a question many don’t contemplate when it comes to Christianity. We sing “Victory in Jesus” and “Faith is the Victory,” but consider this: if Jesus won the victory, He had to defeat someone.

The defeat of Satan is a running theme from Genesis to Revelation. The first prophecy about Jesus was also a prophecy about His victory over Satan.

“And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

Of course, Satan did his best to keep this prophecy from coming to pass. Perhaps thinking it applied to Abel, he encouraged Cain to kill him. Many years later, Satan must have surely thought he had it overcome when the thought of every man was only on evil continually (Genesis 6:5). But he was wrong again because “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (6:8).

When that promise was reiterated through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Satan didn’t stand pat and wait for it to happen. He encouraged Pharaoh to kill all the males from Jacob’s family line. When the promise was again reiterated to David, Satan looked for ways to up-end things. Have you noticed how many of David’s sons get killed? There even came a point where Satan almost succeeded. He was one small baby away from victory over God.

What Satan meant for his greatest victory God turned into Satan’s stunning defeat.

“When Athaliah...saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal seed. But Jehoshaphat...took Joash the son of

Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king’s sons which were slain; and they hid him, even him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain” (2 Kings 11:1-2).

The constant cry of the Old Testament prophets was (paraphrased), Why is Satan winning? Even while Jesus walked the earth, He referred to Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), and Paul called him “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). It looked as though Satan had sewn up the victory.

But then came the cross.

What Satan meant for his greatest victory God turned into Satan's stunning defeat. Mankind had no hope of defeating Satan, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). It took God to do it, in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the "seed of woman," lived and died a sinless life and overcame the massive deficit humanity had fallen into. This is why Jesus said, "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31).

Revelation 12 discusses Satan's defeat at the cross/resurrection, calling it a "war in heaven," showing the after-effects of this victory over God's enemy. When Satan is defeated, a voice from heaven (verses 10-11) proclaims "Now [that Satan has been defeated] comes":

- Salvation (Acts 2:38)
- Strength (Greek word *dunamis*, or power, very frequently used of miraculous power—Acts 1:8)
- The kingdom of our God (the church, Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13)
- The power/authority of His Christ (Matthew 28:18-20)

Now, imagine this scene: a football team comes from behind to overwhelm its opponent. And when victory is guaranteed, they take a moment to invite everyone to come from the stands and sign a contract with them. You look around, Is this serious? The owner of the team again asks everyone who wants to be a part of the winning team to come sign a contract. You

don't have to do any of the work to defeat the other side (because it has already been done), but you get to share in the joy and victory, and get paid too!

Of course, that illustration seems ridiculous, until you realize that's exactly what God is offering. Satan has been defeated, and Jesus invites everyone to come join in the victory, in essence saying, "You can be part of the winning side, because I have already defeated the enemy." And in addition to being able to join the victorious side, you also get to share in the rewards of victory—eternity with the Father and Son.

Many in the first century took this offer. "You have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:13). "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11).

O' glorious victory!



When Christ Comes Again

John W. Moore

“Don’t make any plans for next Monday. There may not be a next Monday,” so reported the January 29, 1962, Connecticut edition of *The Meriden Journal*. Earlier that same year, astrologers had predicted world-ending catastrophes because five planets in our solar system, along with the sun and moon, were expected to assemble in a unique way around the constellations of Capricorn and Aquarius. With the possibility of impending doom, millions in India prayed to ward off the frightening prediction.

Some even fled their homes in fear and congregated at religious holy sites for refuge.

Of course, 1962 has come and gone, and in case you haven’t noticed, we are still here. As 1962 has come and gone, so have numerous prophets who have predicted either the end of the world or the second coming of Christ.

It is believed that since the first century A.D., there have been over 175 well-publicized predictions regarding the end of the world - all of which have proven to be false. This did not deter California’s Harold Camping (along

with a “Christian”-based radio program) from spending over \$100 million to promote his prediction of May 21, 2011, as the end of the world and the Day of Judgment spoken of in the Bible. With the dawn of May 22, Camping claimed he miscalculated the so-called biblical clues he allegedly discovered, and he proffered another date for October 21 of that same year. It, too, has come and gone, but what re-

Despite the many attempts to predict the Lord’s final coming, the Bible says that no one knows “the day nor the hour, wherein the son of man cometh” (Matt. 25:13).

mains, along with the existence of the earth, is ignorance among the populace about the great Bible doctrine of the second coming of Christ.

From the time of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15) until the announcement by angels of His birth, the coming of Jesus the Messiah was the central message of God’s revelation to man (e.g. Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:27-29; Deut. 18:15,18; Acts 3:22-23; Mic. 5:2; Luke 2:4-7).

His appearance and the establishment of His kingdom were precisely predicted to occur during the days of the Roman kings and before the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan. 2-9). This first advent of Jesus was for the purpose of salvation and to fulfill the

promises of the law (Matt. 5:17; 9:13; John 9:39; Heb. 9:13-28; 10:9).

The essence of this appearance is captured in the following statement: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). He did indeed come and made it clear that He would go back home to be with the Father (John 16:5, 28). He also made it clear that He would one day come again.

While the first advent of our Lord was centered upon seeking and saving that which was lost (Luke 19:10; John 12:47), His second coming is characterized by judgment (Rev. 22:12; Heb. 9:28), whether in the final judgment at the end of the world or on nations past or present. Indeed Jesus came in judgment upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (just as He had prophesied, Luke 21:24-27) and upon those who persecuted Christians (see the book of Revelation, esp. 22:7, 12, 20). It was also promised that Jesus would come in judgment upon a church if they would not repent: “do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick” (Rev. 2:5; cf. 2:16; 3:11).

Though Jesus has in a figurative way already come a “second” time in judgment on cities or nations, there will one day be a final coming. Using the imagery of a fiery baptism, John preached that Jesus would one day “thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat in to the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:7-12).

The second coming of the Lord in final judgment will come without warning, as a thief in the night (2 Pet. 3:10); and accompanied by angels (2 Thess. 1:7; Matt. 25:31). The final judgment will commence with the trump of God and the shout of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16). The dead will be raised, all will be judged according to their works (Acts 17:30; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10), and the earth shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10). According to Matthew 25, the world will be separated into two groups—one bound for the new heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 22:1-4) and the other bound for hell. Those who did the will of the Father will enter into heaven (Matt. 7:21-23). Those who did not know God and those who either did not obey the gospel or who failed to do His will, or who lived in ungodliness, will go away into everlasting punishment (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 21:8; Matt. 25:31-46.). On the other hand, those who trust in both God and Christ need not be troubled, for the Lord is preparing for them a mansion (John 14:1-3).

He will one day come again, and the faithful Christian will be resurrected in a new body unto everlasting life, caught up together in the heavens with Christ and all the faithful saints (1 Cor. 15:51-58; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Thess. 4: 17) to then inhabit the bliss of heaven (Rev. 21-22).

Despite the many attempts to predict the Lord’s final coming, the Bible says that no one knows “the day nor the hour, wherein the son of man cometh”

(Matt. 25:13). Those who use Matthew 24, particularly the signs found in verses six through thirty-three, to calculate the end of the world fail to understand that this passage refers to the Lord's coming in judgment on Jerusalem when He allowed the Romans to conquer it in A.D. 70.

Jesus clearly taught that the signs pointing to His judgment on Jerusalem would be fulfilled within the time frame of that present generation (Matt. 24:34). Because there will be no warning signs, and no gospel of a second chance, a soul must prepare for eternity

today. We do not know when the Lord will return, but He will return someday and demand an accounting of the talents He has given us (Matt. 25:14-30).

Knowing that Christ is coming to hold us accountable should motivate us to live holy, godly, and righteously (2 Pet. 3:11; Titus 2:11-12). Conversely, "receiving the end of our faith" and the salvation of our souls at His coming should help to comfort us during times of persecution and trial. If we gird up the loins of our mind and hope to the end, we can rejoice with joy unspeakable and be full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8-13).

The "Easy" Sermons

Johnny O. Trail

As far as I know, I have never preached in a congregation that a former murdered attended. Individuals can get forgiveness for any sin that they are willing to repent of and seek forgiveness for according to God's word (1 Corinthians 6:9ff; cf. Acts 2:38). This being true, even people who commit such crimes can be forgiven if they chose to obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Like all faithful proclaimers of the gospel, I would not be opposed to preaching the word to a congregation that had multiple murderers within it. Hopefully, they would become willing to repent at the teaching of the truth.

That having been said, it would be easy to preach several sermons on the topic of murder to people who were

never guilty of murder. Everyone would presumably hear the truth, and no person would likely be offended. After all, how can one be offended by hearing a sermon over a topic that he is not morally accountable for in the first place?

In all honesty, we know what the "easy" sermons are all about. Oh, do not misunderstand me, we need to proclaim the entire counsel of God (Acts 20:7), even when it is an "easy" sermon. However, it might be possible for one to preach for a long time and never deal with any serious or controversial topic.

Continually teaching on the "easy" topics does not stimulate the growth that Christians should be receiving. Hebrews 5:12-14 says, "For though by

this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” If one is continually fed milk, he becomes malnourished. At some point, one needs to feast upon the meat of the word and grow to maturity.

Furthermore, these types of sermons are easy to hear and easy to preach because there is no reasonable expectation of change in the absence of moral culpability and no worries of complaints to the preacher or elders. Easy sermons might be decidedly scriptural in nature but do little to address the real issues that brethren are grappling with in their lives morally speaking.

Moreover, easy sermons might not address the true nature of discipleship and being remade into the image of Christ. It is not popular to tell people that they might have to suffer for what they believe. Luke 9:23-24 says, “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.’” Discipleship can mean just that—true suffering for the cause of Christ.

Then there are the sermons that are sometimes labeled as “fluff” sermons. That is, sermons that have extraordinarily little doctrinal content and endeavor to make everyone feel good about whatever their spiritual condition in life is. Again, these sermons contain little regarding expectation of change among the hearers and the one proclaiming the message. This might be akin to the situation that Isaiah was addressing in Isaiah 30:9-11 when he says, “That this is a rebellious people, Lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the LORD; Who say to the seers, ‘Do not see,’ And to the prophets, ‘Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, Turn aside from the path, Cause the Holy One of Israel To cease from before us.’”

Typically, such sermons are light on scripture and heavy on feel-good analogies. Sadly, a steady diet of “fluff” sermons can make Christians weak in the faith.

Then, there are the hard sermons. Those are the ones that “get on your toes” and potentially leave you with a sinking feeling. These sermons demand that you change your life to reflect the correct teachings of scripture. Evidently, Paul was criticized and ostracized for preaching on topics that were not popular among the brethren. Galatians 4:16 says, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” Sadly, this sometimes

happens to faithful evangelists in our age too.

Some hard sermons deal with overt sins while others deal with sins of neglect in Christian discipleship. The hard sermons are not pleasant to deliver or easy to hear, but they are needed. One cannot approach the corpus of scripture, study through it, and leave the word without any expectation of complete and total change.

Romans 12:1-2 says, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The hard sermons should challenge us to examine ourselves and make adjustments in our lives if necessary. Repentance (change) can be difficult, but it is necessary if one wants to be a disciple of Christ.

Luke 13:3, 5 says, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Repentance is required for the one who would be converted to Christ.

Acts 3:19 says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

From several years of preaching, I have kept a mental list of the “hard” sermons that I have delivered. Topics such as marriage, divorce, and remarriage top the list (Matthew 19:1-10). A close second over the years is modest dress (1 Peter 3:3-4). Next might be our contribution upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). The list could go on, but suffice to say these sermons deal with situations that our brethren struggle with, and they need to be offered in sound congregations.

There needs to be balance in our proclamation of God’s word. We need the “hard” sermons, and we need the ones that encourage the downtrodden and edify those working for the expansion of the kingdom. If we focus on the bad without emphasizing the good, we have missed the mark in heralding the word of God.

This balance is reflected in the admonition that Paul gives to Timothy when he says in 2 Timothy 4:2-5, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Get Off at the Next Station

Cameron Miller

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he warns the young minister of individuals who would depart from the faith (4:1). This was not some vague admonition, but instead Paul discussed specific ways by which Timothy could notice such a departure and guard against it. In the first two verses, we read of three steps that characterize a straying from the doctrine which is seen to be so important throughout the epistle. They are: "giving heed to deceiving spirits," "speaking lies in hypocrisy," and "forbidding...and commanding" things contrary to God's desires. These three steps should be important reminders for us to be vigilant. Breaking down each point provides some insight into how righteousness OR unrighteousness can be chosen.

First, giving heed – paying attention – to "deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons." Deception is a ploy of the devil, and any deception is in opposition to the truth (2 Cor. 6:8 – see the comparisons Paul uses between honor and dishonor, unknown/well-known, etc.). Hearing of teachings given by spirits and demons may be confusing, but it doesn't have to keep us from understanding the passage. We read some specifics pertaining to this doctrine in 4:3, but the main takeaway for us is to not give heed to any message of righteousness that doesn't come from God. Rather than paying attention to

falsehoods that may at times sound enticing, we should reject them. This keeps us from getting on the train and heading down the tracks that lead away from the one and only faith.

Second, the idea of speaking lies in hypocrisy. Paul wrote that those individuals had "seared their consciences as with a hot iron." The phrase carries with it the idea of branding – something that we understand to be a one-time event. It may be that certain situations in our life directly take us away from the truth, but it may also be the case that over time our consciences become less sensitive to evil until we don't even recognize that we are speaking lies. The Pharisees were called hypocrites by Jesus because they should have known the truth, but instead they went astray while following their own beliefs and desires. This is a turning point in the process of departing from the faith: the truth is forgotten and replaced with lies.

Finally, this departure shows its full effect when the strayer begins to teach others to act in the same way. Those in Timothy's context were forbidding the practice of marriage (which Paul had already shown to be acceptable and good – how else would there be elders or deacons?!) and commanding to abstain from different kinds of food. We don't know what exactly, but we should remember that Jesus declared to

Peter that all foods are now clean (Acts 10:9-16). In our day, this idea may manifest itself in a person demanding that others jump through certain hoops or subscribe to certain behaviors in order to be righteous – things not specified by God in His word. The cycle begins again, and another train arrives in the station. The ones hearing the false doctrine may “heed” and then turn to the lies themselves. It’s clear how dangerous this cycle can be.

I’m reminded of the first few verses of the very first Psalm. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.” There are steps to leaving the truth that should be understood and avoided by all those who value their faith. Taking these dangerous steps – walking past, then standing near, then sitting with sin – may be obvious, or

it may happen gradually with few external warning signs. Like Paul urged Timothy, we must pay attention to the true doctrine of Christ, “for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (4:16). May we always recognize when we are beginning to stray, and may we have the courage to get off that train before it departs, and head back toward God!



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How Do You See Others?

Van Sprague

The lens through which we see others affects how we treat them and develop ourselves. Do we view those around us with a microscope, a telescope, or a kaleidoscope?

Microscopes may be helpful for observing small things but shouldn't be used for the judgment of our fellow man. After listing characteristics Christians should grow in, Peter said, "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:8, 9).

When we are harshly judging someone by an appearance or action, without practicing kindness and love, we are observing them so closely that it is unfair to them and hurtful to our spiritual development. Being overly or hypercritically judgmental makes us hypocritical, and God promises that we will be judged more harshly.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let

me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1-5).

Telescopes, on the other hand, can be useful in observing distant objects, but they are not so helpful in understanding human beings. Jesus taught about the seriousness of demeaning one another, warning, "You have heard that it was said to those of old 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21, 22).

It seems to be a steep punishment for calling someone names, but Jesus was handling the core of the issue of murder. "Raca" means "empty head." Name-calling may be "par for the course" in this world, but it is an early step in viewing another person as less than who they are. Dehumanizing someone makes it easier to mistreat them and think the worst of them. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15).

Kaleidoscopes, in the way that they can take mundane-looking objects and through displaying different facets-cause us to wonder at them, may be an illustration of how we can view each other as God does. We were created in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). From this point, alone, every person is precious and worthy of our kindness. It unites mankind in a brotherhood of creation.

Being aware of our own sins, and our reliance upon our Savior, we should “so speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12, 13). James went on to teach about our tongue and to explain how it should not be the case that “With it we bless our God and Father,

and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God” (James 3:9).

We view someone the right way when we judge righteous judgment. That’s a judgment that doesn’t only take outward appearance into play, but it considers all relevant evidence in light of God’s will (John 7:24). This will assure that we do not look so closely at other’s actions that it seems they can do no right and we can do no wrong. It reminds us that “we are brethren” (Genesis 13:8), so we act accordingly, offering others the loving-kindness already given to them by our Creator. All people are multifaceted, unique creations of God. We should strive to view them as no more and no less than He does. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).



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Studies in the Biblical Doctrine of Salvation

Andy Erwin

The present study will be limited to answering two fundamental questions: (1) what must I do to be saved? and, (2) what must I do to remain saved?

All Christians should affirm (1) that man is saved by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8) and (2) that sins are atoned by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:11). Without God's grace being manifested by the offering of His Son, we would not be having this discussion. Our concern should be to understand *how* man is saved by God's grace and *when* man's sins are atoned by the blood of Christ.

Reconciliation, Grace, and A Covenantal Relationship

The primary reason for Christ's coming to earth was to reconcile the lost to God. God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14). His reconciliation provides renewed fellowship with God, redemption, and all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Our Savior did not come only to reconcile or save one certain race or people, but the

obedient of every race and all nations (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47). In Christ, all men can be saved, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Christ provides reconciliation to "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) through the ransom of His life. Jesus came to minister and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).¹

Forgiveness is an executive act. One cannot be forgiven a debt unless the one with the authority to forgive the debt forgives it. God is the only one with the authority to forgive the sin-debt which man owes. One cannot be forgiven and reconciled to God without faith, repentance, and obedience. These are the requirements stipulated by God. God has required faith, repentance, and obedience from man beginning with the fall in Eden. God is offering grace, mercy, and help to those who believe, repent, and obey Him. Herein we find the basis for God's

¹ Some will no doubt disagree with our assessment of the atonement. According to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Of God's Eternal Decree," Chapter III, we read: "God has predestined and fore-ordained some men and angels out of his free grace and love without any foresight of faith in either of them, and others are fore-ordained to everlasting death and the number of either is so certain and definite that it cannot be increased or diminished."

Accordingly, if one is saved, it is because God elected him before the foundation of the world (see Edward T. Hiscox, *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, (Philadelphia, PA: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1951), 57). Of course, this gives rise to the doctrine of limited atonement. Seeing that God has ordained some to life and others to death, the atonement provided by Christ is *limited* in its scope and application.

covenantal relationship with man (cf. Deut. 7:9).

One might ask, how does God's grace relate to our salvation? By grace, God has taught us certain virtues (cf. Titus 2:11-12). By grace, God extends mercy to whom He will and "reserves the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9). God has determined and set the standard for man's life accord to His just nature and commands all men everywhere to obey Him (Acts 17:30-31). Consequently, when man obeys God, he is accepting the gift of God's grace – i.e. the atonement of His only-begotten Son. If man refuses to obey God, he is rejecting the gift of God's grace; he is rejecting Christ. Without grace, there would be no covenant to accept.

Man is saved by grace through faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). But without grace, faith is meaningless. You will observe, the devils believe and tremble (Jas. 2:19). They believe, but tremble, because they can never be the recipients of grace (Matt. 25:41; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). On the other hand, man cannot rely solely on grace while refusing to obey God (Rom. 6:1-2). Countless scriptures teach man's role in accepting God's grace through humble obedience. In fact, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6 ff.). God offers His grace – His divine favor – which bestows forgiveness,

mercy, help, and compassion upon the recipients. However, man must accept God's offer to enter a covenantal relationship and receive these blessings.

What Must I Do to be Saved?

To be recipients of God's grace, man must respond to God's commands with faith, penitence, and obedience. Faith is not merely a New Testament concept. Habakkuk teaches, "The just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4). The writer of Hebrews quotes Habakkuk (Heb. 10:38) and then proceeds to define faith and provide Old Testament examples of those who lived by faith in chapter eleven. Accordingly, man is to come to God with conviction, with "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22), with certainty that He exists and that He rewards (Heb. 11:6), as from the Old Testament we learn that "biblical faith is an assurance, a certainty, in contrast with modern concepts of faith as something possible, hopefully true, but not certain."²

New Testament writers understood the nature of faith as a conviction and a substantial certainty undergirding the hope of the believer. A person must come to God by faith – i.e., with conviction and certainty that He exists and that He rewards. A person must make decisions based upon this conviction – this *faith*. To violate this conviction would be sinful (Rom. 14:23). We are saved by faith, but not by faith *alone*.

² R. Laird Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old*

Testament (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1980), 51.

Our conviction and certainty in God must move us to action (Jas. 2:14 ff.).

The cardinal doctrine of evangelical churches is salvation by faith alone through grace alone.³ Ephesians 2:8-10 has become a passage of critical importance to the discussion of salvation, and rightly so. Evangelicals are divided on their interpretation of this passage. Calvinists believe that Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches that faith is the gift of God. This interpretation is in keeping with their theory that man is depraved⁴ and then regenerated through the direct operation (regeneration) of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Faith, for them, is part of the regenerating work of the Spirit.⁶ Thus, faith itself is the gift of God.

Other evangelicals would like for this passage to read, “You are saved

through faith *only*.” Adherents to this doctrine read the word “alone” or “only” into passages which state the critical importance of faith to one’s salvation. In such cases, evangelicals fail to see a figure of speech known as a “synecdoche of the part”⁷ which is used many times in passages pertaining to salvation.

A synecdoche of the part is the terminology used to represent that figure of speech that calls for the part to represent the whole. We read this form of synecdoche in 1 Peter 3:21: “baptism now saves us.” Baptism is the only action mentioned, but it does not exclude all other necessary actions. We know that faith must precede baptism (Mark 16:16). Moreover, baptism is meaningless apart from repentance (Acts 2:38).

³ An example of this doctrine being so stated is found in the *United Methodist Member's Handbook*, revised by George Koehler (Discipleship Resources, 2006), 78-79.

⁴ According to this doctrine, the consequences of Adam’s sin have produced a depraved nature within every man and the inability to do anything good. See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VI, “Of the Fall of Man, Of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof,” Parts II, III, and IV; also see Chapter X, “Of Free Will,” Parts III and IV, of the same work.

⁵ “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation” (*Canons of Dort*, III, IV; Article 3).

⁶ “Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds” (*Canons of Dort*, Article 11).

⁷ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 640.

Matthew 10:31-32 speaks only of confession. Of course, there would be no reason to confess if you did not believe. Luke 13:3, 5 speaks only of repentance. Yet, repentance is affected because of belief. So, it is with the word “faith.” While many passages speak only of faith, it is not intended that faith stand apart from repentance, confession, and baptism.^{8,9} Thus, on many occasions, “faith” stands as an all-encompassing term which includes the totality of man’s response to God.

Three times in Acts the question of what to do to be saved is raised – on Pentecost (Acts 2:37), by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:6), and by the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30). Three times the answer was given according to the spiritual whereabouts of the individual(s) asking.

On Pentecost, believing Jews were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Seeing that they believed, and that was the reason for their

question, Peter instructed them to repent and be baptized so that their sins could be forgiven.

Saul of Tarsus believed while on the road to Damascus and was told to go to Damascus and wait to be told what he must do. For three days in Damascus, he prayed and fasted (proof of repentance) (Acts 9:9, 11). When Ananias came to him, he told Saul of God’s plan for him, laid his hands on him so that he could receive his sight, and commanded him to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (a confession) (Acts 22:16). Saul was not commanded to believe or repent, for it was evident that he was already a penitent, believing man. Rather, he was told to do that which he had not done so that he might be forgiven and become a child of God.

The Philippian jailer is a classic example of how “faith only” adherents treat the Scriptures. When he asked what he must do to be saved, he was told, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

⁸ In English we have three words signifying three distinct actions. These words are: immerse, sprinkle, and pour. So also in the New Testament, we have three Greek words denoting three separate actions. Βαπτισμα is transliterated *baptism* in English. The root word for βαπτισμα is βαπτο, which means “to dip, to dip in, to plunge, to bury, to cover up, to immerse.” Paul defined baptism as a burial (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12-13). While *Webster’s Dictionary* cites baptism to be immersion, sprinkling, or pouring, the New Testament tells a different story. Had the inspired writers desired to command the sprinkling or pouring of water, rather than an immersion in water,

two perfectly acceptable words could have been chosen – παντιζω (to sprinkle), and εκξεω (to pour). Furthermore, of the many times Hebrew words for “pour” and “sprinkle” were translated into the Greek for the Septuagint, why can we not find one instance in which a representative for the family of βαπτο is used? If βαπτο could also mean to pour or to sprinkle, why did these seventy Greek scholars not recognize it?

⁹ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 95.

and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). At this point “faith only” people seemingly stop reading, but if we read the entire conversion account, we will learn that the jailer was not a believer and thus this is where he had to start on his journey to Christ.

If we continue reading, we will learn that Paul and Silas proceeded to speak unto him and his household the word of the Lord so that they might believe. For this man and those of his house to believe in Jesus, they first had to hear the gospel preached, and then they had to obey. Having heard the gospel and washed the stripes which had been placed on the backs of Paul and Silas (proof of repentance), Paul took them the same hour of the night and baptized them according to the command of Christ (Acts 16:33; Mark 16:15-16). After being baptized, these new Christians, Paul, and Silas went back into the house, ate, and rejoiced together (v.34).

From these three instances we learn how we must recognize people’s unique situations and begin teaching from that point so that they can obey the gospel. Paul also took this approach with teaching the twelve men in Ephesus who had been taught only the baptism of John the Baptist. Another example of such teaching is found in the eighth chapter of Acts. Philip

taught the eunuch about Jesus. He began with what the eunuch understood and explained unto him what he did not understand. While the text says nothing about Philip mentioning baptism, the eunuch did conclude that he needed to be baptized (Acts 8:36).

The gospel must be preached, believed, and obeyed for a person to be saved (Mark 16:15-16). Every man must receive the word of God (Acts 8:14; Jas 1:21). To become a disciple, each person must hear and receive the word of God. Man is to receive the word of God “with meekness” (Jas. 1:21); even as a “little child” (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17); and “with all readiness of mind” (Acts 17:11). To receive in this sense simply means “to give ear to; to embrace; to accept; to approve; to welcome; to be open to; and even to make it one’s own.”¹⁰

One cannot fully receive or accept the word of God until he has obeyed its teaching by repenting of sin and being baptized. We find that 3,000 souls repented and “gladly received” the word on Pentecost “and were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

We learn that certain citizens of the city of Samaria “received the word of God” (Acts 8:14) when they accepted the “preaching of the kingdom” and “were baptized” (Acts 8:12). Cornelius and his near friends and kinsmen

¹⁰ See “δεξομαι” and “αποδεξομαι” in Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 55.

“received the word of God” when they yielded in obedience to its teaching and were baptized (Acts 10:48).

At baptism, we become united with Christ and are brought into harmony and spiritual union with His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-7).

According to Paul, baptism stands between the sinner and being freed from his sins. By being baptized into His death, you have the promise of being in the likeness of His resurrection, destroying the old man of sin and thus being freed from the bondage of sin.

God has selected the action of baptism to signify the point in which we are united with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. One cannot obey the gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ without being baptized. One cannot be resurrected unto a new man without a death and burial of the old man.

From Colossians 2:11-13 we can observe that baptism stands between man and (1) putting off the body of the sins of the flesh; (2) being buried with Christ; (3) being raised with Christ through faith in the operation of God; (4) being made alive together with Him; and (5) being forgiven of all trespasses. You will note that Paul has said essentially the same thing and made the same key points pertaining to

baptism in this passage as in Romans 6:3-7. Also, let it be observed that the forgiveness found in baptism is not a work of men but “the working of God.”

Evangelicals and strict Calvinists alike believe that baptism is only an ordinance of the church.¹¹ This belief is derived from Protestant Reformation; but the earliest Christians believed differently concerning baptism and its place in the plan of salvation.

“Quite impressive is the way all second-century authors speak of the meaning and benefits of baptism... The unanimity and vigor of the early second-century statements about baptism are presumptive of a direct relationship between baptism and forgiveness of sins from the early days of the church. The consistency with which second-century authors make the statements which they do would have been impossible if this had not been the common Christian understanding earlier. It is inconceivable that the whole Christian world reversed its understanding of the meaning of its central rite of conversion within fifty years of the lifetime of the apostles.”¹²

The Epistle of Barnabas (c. 70-130)

“Blessed are they who, placing their trust in the cross, have gone down into the water... We indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement.

¹¹Such is taught while admitting that the word ordinance does not appear in the New Testament with reference to baptism or the Lord’s Supper. See Herschel H. Hobbs,

What Baptists Believe (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1964), 83.

¹² Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, 3rd ed. (Abilene, TX: ACU Press), 38.

However, we come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and trust in Jesus in our spirit.”¹³

Shepherd of Hermas (c. 150)

“I heard, sir, some teachers maintain that there is no other repentance than that which takes place, when we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins.”¹⁴

Irenaeus (c. 180)

“[Scripture] says, ‘And he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan.’ It was not for nothing that Naaman of old when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon his being baptized. Rather, this was a symbol for us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and invocation of the Lord. We are spiritually regenerated as new-born babes, just as the Lord has declared: ‘Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’”¹⁵

Clement of Alexandria (c. 195)

“Our transgressions were taken away by one Paeonian medicine, the baptism of the Word. We are washed from all our sins, and no longer

entangled in evil. This is the one grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing.”¹⁶

Tertullian (c. 198)

“‘Unless a man has been born again of water and Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.’ These words have tied faith to the necessity of baptism. Accordingly, all thereafter who became believers were baptized. So it was, too, that Paul, when he believed, was baptized.”¹⁷

From the testimony of second-century writers, we can see how they affirmed the necessity of water baptism in order to be born again. Yet, no matter how strong the statements of these writers may be, they are useless unless they express the truth of the gospel.

What Must I Do to Remain Saved?

A person becomes a child of God by faith, penitence, and obedience. One must obey certain conditions or commandments given by God. The word “if” demonstrates that there are conditions and promises predicated upon our choices. The New Testament is full of passages instructing saints and sinners alike through conditional qualifying statements.¹⁸

¹³ 1.144

¹⁴ 2.22

¹⁵ 1.574

¹⁶ 2.216-7

¹⁷ 3.676

¹⁸ Take, for instance, 1 Corinthians 15:1-2: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to

you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, *if* you hold fast that word which I preached to you—*unless* you believed in vain.” Also consider, “...but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if* we hold

The Calvinistic doctrine of perseverance of the saints maintains that while the child of God may sin outwardly, his inward being has been forever sanctified and regenerated by the blood of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Accordingly, regardless of what the flesh (or outward man) may do, the inner man will remain pure.²⁰ However, you will observe from the Scriptures that God does indeed hold the child of God accountable for the “sins of the flesh” (see Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Cor. 6:20). Man is responsible to God for his body *and* his spirit.

The Christian must continue believing, repenting of sin, and obeying the Lord. The terms of the covenant do not end when the covenant is entered. The Lord Himself said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). Paul warned the Corinthians, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). The manner of life for a Christian should be characterized by holiness and godliness (2 Pet. 3:11). Christians need to be diligent to make their calling and election sure by adding to their faith (2 Pet. 1:5-11), that is, by growing in the grace and knowledge of

the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18) and maturing in Christ (Heb. 5:11 ff.).

It is possible to depart from the living God through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13). If this happens, God has provided a way to be *restored* (Gal. 6:1-2) and *converted* (Jas. 5:19-20) to the faith. The erring Christian must remember, repent, and return. “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” (Rev. 2:5).

Paul said, “If a man is *overtaken* in any trespass...” (Gal. 6:1). The sin has taken control of the man so as to direct his thoughts, words, or deeds. It is not merely that the brother has sin which he needs to confess to God, for every Christian has such a need. The sin of this man has subdued his spirit and subjugated his soul so as to mar his influence for good and to cause him to wander from the fold of God. We should regard this brother as one who needs to be restored to his former place. His sin has caused him to defect from the truth and divorce himself from Christ.

By being overtaken in his sins, he has walked out on the fellowship he had with God and the church, which is in Christ. God did not leave him. God

fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Heb. 3:6).

¹⁹ See footnote 6.

²⁰ 1 John 3:9 is a favorite verse used in defense of this belief: “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (NKJV). C. R.

Nichol dealt with this argument in his “Possibility of Apostasy” (Clifton, TX: Nichol Publishing Co., 1951), 19-22). Herein, he argued that “cannot sin” is spoken in a prohibitive sense, seeing that John has already instructed Christians in general concerning sin (see 1 John 1:8 ff.).

will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). The wayward child left God. The erring child of God has literally divorced himself from the most sacred of all his relationships. Through the deceitfulness of sin, he has departed from the living God (Heb. 3:12). To *restore* is to put that brother or sister in the order of the former condition, even with all the fullness of Christian fellowship that once existed.

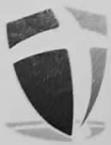
While the Savior teaches that no man is able “to pluck” us out of the Father’s hand (John 10:28-29), even this is conditioned upon our hearing His voice and following Him (John 10:27). We have the promise that as long as we are hearing and following Christ, we “*shall never perish.*” It is when we quit hearing and following Christ that we depart from God.

It is God’s will that we walk in His light, not in the darkness of sin (1 John 1:6-10). The apostle John said, “If we

say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6-7).

Faithful Christians are in fellowship with God. Being in fellowship with God requires walking in the light and results in continued fellowship with all others also in fellowship with God. The blessing inherent with such providential fellowship remains: “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

The two most important questions we can consider on the subject of salvation are (1) what must I do to be saved? and (2) what must I do to remain saved? We must answer these questions individually and biblically, from the heart and from the Bible. No other answer will work.



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The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:10-13

Introduction

1. The Olivet Discourse: judgement on the Jewish nation and the general judgment typified by that event. Matthew 24, 25.
2. What should our attitude be in the presence of the Lord's absence?

Discussion

I. The Lord Is Coming Again.

- A. With power and great glory. 24:30
- B. It will be sudden. Lightning - 24:27; Thief - 24:43, 44; Snare - Luke 21:35
- C. It will be unexpected. 24:37-39. Life is going on as usual.
- D. It will be a time of separation. 24:40, 41; 25:31, 32.

II. Church Members Are One of Two Types

- A. The Lord's use of the words "wise" and "foolish." Matthew 7:24
- B. Some church members are "spiritually minded." 2 Peter 1:7-9; Galatians 5:22, 23; Matthew 6:24; Titus 2:11-14
- C. Some church members are "carnally minded." Galatians 5:7; Colossians 3:1, 12-17; 1 John 2:15-17

III. Religion Is a Very Personal Matter

- A. We cannot borrow another's spirituality. "Give us..."
- B. Some even now are counting on somebody else. Member of a sound church; preacher's prayers; godly mother; etc.
- C. Accountability is a personal matter. Romans 14:12

IV. When The Door Is Shut It Is All Over

- A. What shuts the door? Apostasy can do it. Death can do it. The second coming will do it. Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 9:27
- B. What will it mean to be on the outside of the door? With no chance of change. To be lost eternally. To be reaping what you have sown. Luke 16:19-31; Galatians 6:7-9; 2 Corinthians 5:10.
- C. What will it mean to be on the inside of the door? Beyond the reach of Satan. To be with those of like precious faith. To be safe in the arms of Jesus. Revelation 20:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Conclusion

1. Song: "When Jesus Comes to Reward His Servants."
2. His delay is for your advantage. 2 Peter 3:9

- *Mike Kiser*

I Stand Amazed

John DeBerry

The apostle Paul was one of the most accomplished and educated men of ancient times. The record shows that his secular and spiritual education were the best the world had to offer. Known as Saul of Tarsus, he had been taught as a boy in the temple and synagogue as required by the Jew's religion. Because Saul was born into a family with means and position, they were able to place him with the most renowned rabbi of that day, Gamaliel. By his grammar and writing style, we can see that Saul's secular education was equally impressive, as many scholars believe he was also educated at the school in Tarsus, one of the most elite in the Roman Empire.

Paul stated that while all of this was good, when compared to what he received from God's wisdom, he counted "them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8). After meeting Christ on the Damascus Road, being converted three days later, and being commissioned as an apostle, Paul understood what God had been preparing him for his entire life. Now, it was not about him, his education, or his talent; it was the wisdom and forethought of the mighty God in heaven.

Paul's education was not merely intended to make him outstanding and wise among men. His learning forced him to see the amazing majesty of God.

His great learning paled in comparison to the fathomless wisdom and power of God. When writing the brethren at Rome, Paul voiced his sentiments about the glory of God, writing, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

Paul had lost the haughty arrogance that had blinded him to the deity of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God's promises. Prior to his enlightenment, he had studied only to live up to himself and to give foundation to his sense of entitlement as a Jew and a Roman. How many of us have lost sight of God's greatness? How many of us are seeking to be great among ourselves? David has well said, "Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him" (Psalm 33:8).

We are taught in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." How can we accomplish this without reverence, respect, and awe? It will not be until "I stand amazed" that I will be able to humble myself and truly worship God.

I stand amazed. I stand in awe. I stand forgiven in midst of it all. Before you I bow, before you I fall. Blessed redeemer, sweet savior of all.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Bill Irby

A primary element of the Christian faith is that the God of the Bible is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-2:3). What do you think about that? I suspect rather firmly that most people reading this article would agree that God created all things.

Yes, but have you thought about it lately? The reason I ask is that the Christian faith is being opposed in many different ways these days, and we need to have our powder dry in order to meet this opposition.

When Paul was helping the church at Philippi deal with some less than scrupulous preachers, he said he was “set for the defense of the gospel” (Philippians 1:17). We need to be ready too. Remember 1 Peter 3:15, where that apostle wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

We have Paul himself set to defend the gospel and Peter telling us to defend, or give good reasons, for our hope. I suggest that for us to do this we have to think deeply and carefully about the great things taught in the Word of God. I mentioned the truth that God is Creator of all things. Let us think about that. The Bible teaches that God created and made everything.

Creating and making are not the same things. If I have some lumber and some tools, I can make a box or a shelf. It may not be the best piece of work but given enough time I could do it. But what I cannot do is create a tree from which to make the boards. One makes things out of that which has been created.

God created all that is the physical universe. He also made things. He is able to create and make. No one else can do that. Men try and claim to have accomplished “creating” something, but all their efforts began with something already here! We can make things out of what we have found in God’s creation, but we do not create “from the ground up.” Furthermore, when we try, we make a horrible mess of things.

This question, “What do you think?” can open doors and create vistas for our own perspectives. It can open doors when we speak with others because when we ask someone what they think, we are not at that moment telling them what we think. In other words, we are using this question to find out where the other person is with regard to spiritual matters. Once we know what they are thinking, we can share with them the teachings of God’s Word that are different from their point of view. We need to know what a

person is thinking before we can make much progress teaching them God's Word. Since no one is a mind reader, the only way to do this is to ask them "What do you think?"

We can also ask this question internally. This is a process of self-examination but with the specific dimension of asking ourselves what we think about a passage in the Bible or a doctrine that we have known a long time and perhaps taken for granted. It is like studying with someone else but instead of another person, the object of our study is our own mind. For instance, think again about Genesis 1. We all know what that passage says on some level, but there is much to be gained by thinking on it in depth for a good long time. There is that created/made distinction that we referenced. And more, like verse 26 in which God says, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." What do you think about that?

Yes, there are many things we can do with our time. None is more rewarding or important than thinking about the word of God. What do you think?



A Parable About a Pebble in a Fishbowl

Robert L. Waggoner

Suppose I have a pebble in a fishbowl. Somehow (I can't imagine how) that pebble develops life and swims to the top. Then it grows legs and crawls out of my fishbowl. Somehow (I know not how) that pebble reproduces itself. Then that pebble and its offspring continue to evolve until there are literally millions of different kinds of creatures in, around, and all over my house.

About that time, you come for a visit. When you see all these creatures, you ask where they all came from. I reply, "Oh, they came from a pebble that crawled out of my fishbowl."

You would think I was crazy, wouldn't you? Yet, some folks tell us that a single-celled creature naturally developed from non-life and then crawled out of a slimy sea onto land. Then after reproducing itself, it slowly but naturally evolved into all the varieties of life forms known in our world today. Isn't that ridiculous?

Even so, our modern public education systems, from preschool through graduate university levels, are now based upon the philosophical and psychological foundations derived from the theory of evolution. Maybe, that's one reason why our world sometimes seems to be out of order!

The image features a black and white photograph of an American flag, showing the stars and stripes, draped over a dark, textured wooden surface. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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