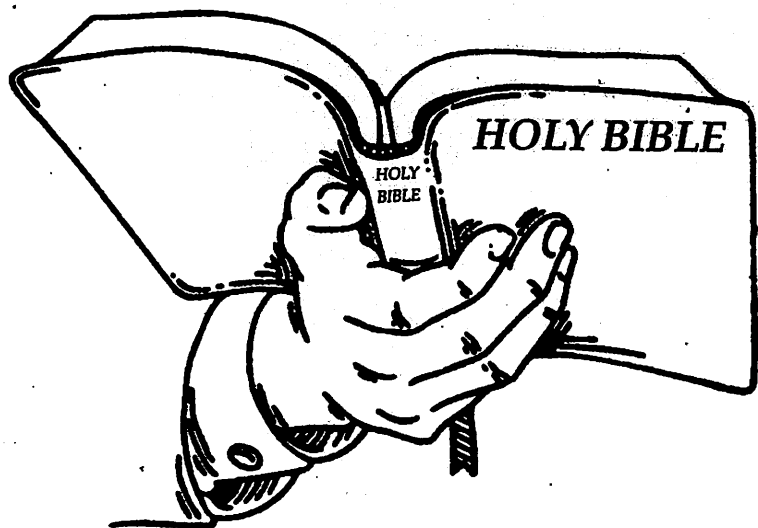


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THE BIBLE TEACHER



BACK TO BASICS

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:118). His promise was fulfilled when His church came into existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Peter commanded the multitude assembled on that day: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). Those who gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:41), as a result three thousand were added to the church on that day by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). That was the beginning of Christ's church.

Of what denomination did those three thousand become members? Our contention is that they joined no denomination. Indeed, denominationalism such as we know in today's world did not even exist then. They had simply obeyed the Gospel and were added by the Lord to His church. They wore no sectarian name, adopted no denominational creed, and belonged to no ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were simply children of God, members of the church, were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Churches of Christ today everywhere plead for a return to that same church with that same simplicity. We do not claim to be a denomination. Our goal is to be that church—nothing more, nothing less—just basic New Testament Christians as people were in the first century.

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Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"

CHRIST, in His conversation with a man, named Nicodemus, told him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'you must be born again'. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8).

There are many things on this earth which we do not really understand. For example, we do not understand how a dead seed, when buried in the earth, turns into a plant and then flowers and bear fruits. Sure, we see that happen. But can we explain how that happens? What about a medicine? How does it work in our body and brings about a desired result? We cannot understand and neither can we explain. But we do observe what it does. And the same could be said about many other things too, such as various foods that we eat. How that helps us live and makes us healthy? The only thing we can say is that God gives it the power to provide

us nutrition and energy.

Nicodemus was astonished and aghast to hear Jesus say that he must be born again. How can that be, was his query? In verse twelve we read, Jesus said to him, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" The fact of the matter is, Christ taught, every person on earth need to be regenerated or born anew to become worthy of heaven. And that regeneration of a soul or spirit is an unexplainable work of God. It cannot be explained or understood in human terms. But must be accepted. Every person, Christ taught, must be born of water and the Spirit to be regenerated or to become a new person in Christ to be acceptable to God and thus to become worthy of living in heaven.

When Christ, after His propitiatory death for the sins of mankind and His subsequent resurrection from the dead, was going back to the Father in heaven, He had commanded His disciples to go and preach His good news to all people everywhere, and He added these words to that command, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:15, 16). By being baptized, according to the Bible, one is buried in water and comes out of it to walk in the newness of life, as we read in Romans 6:3,4. The newness of life or the new life in Christ begins after, not before, one is baptized. The Good News or the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of salvation from the Holy Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:20, 21) to all mankind. And Jesus, the Savior, said one must believe the message and be baptized to be saved. When one does that one is born of the water and the Spirit. This is exactly what happened in all cases of conversion to Christ mentioned in the New Testament. For instance, in Acts chapter 8 we read about eunuch, at Acts 8:39, we read, "and he went on his way rejoicing." Why was he rejoicing? From Acts 8:35-38 we learn, eunuch had heard the gospel message of Jesus Christ and he was immediately baptized. He was rejoicing because he knew that he had done what the Savior had said one must do to be born anew to become a new person worthy to enter heaven. The new birth is the work of God. Man cannot understand how that takes place. Nonetheless, one must be born anew, born of water and of the Spirit to enter the heavenly kingdom of God.

LESSON 10
FORNICATION

J. C. CHOATE

OUR STUDY at this time will have to do with FORNICATION. This is a Bible subject and therefore one that we need to talk about. It may be something that we don't like to discuss in public, and therefore it may be a little embarrassing, but evidently it doesn't bother a lot of people all that much because so many are doing it.

The word fornication simply means illicit sex. It may be done by those who are not married or where married people are having sex with those other than their lawful married partners. Although this is not adultery, it may lead to adultery, that is, it may be responsible for breaking up marriages and that of leading to adulterous marriages.

This is an immoral act that has always been practiced but at least in the past it was somewhat frowned on by the general public. In our present day society around the world there seems to be a more relaxed attitude toward it. It is either encouraged in some circles or at least accepted. Some expressions of this is seen by encouraging young people to go on and live together without bothering with marriage. Homosexuality is also another outgrowth of this loose thinking and living.

The Bible condemns fornication as being an immoral and sinful act. Because of the early Christians having come out of a sinful background where fornication was practiced, and sometimes even as a religious act, then they were exhorted, "That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." (Acts 15:29).

The Apostle Paul spoke of a group of people who had become so wicked that God gave them upto their own vile affections. He goes on to describe them: "For even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving it themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their

knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whispers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Romans 1:26-32). That describes a lot of people today, doesn't it? I mean, they have become so immoral and wicked that they not only find pleasure in such but they loudly proclaim it to the world. Notice that fornication is one of the wicked things listed and Paul declares that these things were worthy of death. And finally, please note that God gave up on these wicked people. Why? Not that they couldn't be saved, if they had been willing to repent of their sins and then to obey God, but he gave up on them because they were not willing to repent. In that case, such people cannot be saved.

The city of Corinth was a very important city in the days of the Apostle Paul. It was also a very wicked city. Among other things, there were many religious temples there given over to prostitution. With people being converted to Christ out of this background then some were tempted to continue to engage in fornication. Therefore, Paul had many things to say to the Christians at Corinth on this subject. For instance, he said, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles..." (1 Corinthians 5:1). He goes on to tell how that one of them had even taken his father's wife, but instead of the members being sad about this, they seemed to take pride in it. Paul therefore urged them to withdraw themselves from such a person. He said, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with the fornicators of this world or with the covetous, or extortioners," etc. (1 Corinthians 5:9,10). In 1 Corinthians 6:13, Paul said, "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." Going on, he said, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that

a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:15-20).

Paul lists fornication as being one of the works of the flesh and those who continue to engage in such things cannot enter the Lord's kingdom, and that means then that they cannot go to heaven. (Galatians 5:19-21). He made a similar statement to the Corinthian Christians: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). To the Ephesian Christians, Paul wrote, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." (Ephesians 5:3). Then to the Christians at Colosse, he exhorted, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ..." (Colossians 3:5, 6). In writing to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul said, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication ..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

So I think you can begin to see that the word of God condemns fornication. It says that we should flee from it, that we should abstain from it, that it should never be named among us or that we should never be guilty of it, that we should not keep company with fornicators, that those who engage in such cannot enter the Lord's kingdom.

Not only that but fornication destroys marriages and causes many other sins to follow. (Matthew 19:9). It is a sin against the body in that it is responsible for venereal diseases, some of which cannot even be cured with modern day medicines. Such immoral conduct can cause insanity and can be passed on to babies, causing blindness, deformity, and other side effects. That doesn't mean that all who become insane, or all babies that are born blind or that may be deformed are the results of fornication, but those who indulge in fornication are subject to these things. Then there

is all of the emotional disturbances that accompany this kind of living, not to mention the possibility of unwanted pregnancies,^t breaking the hearts of the parents, destroying reputations and good names.

The general public has always had the tendency to somewhat overlook the boy or young man, but to hold the girl or young lady responsible for such bad conduct. Actually, both are at fault. But there has been the idea promoted that if no one is hurt, then what does it matter? But someone is always hurt. Friends, both parties are hurt, as well as family members, and others.

Then maybe you have been led to believe that Christians are not as moral in their living as those of other religions. If you have heard this then you have heard wrong. Christ and the Bible advocates, as we have seen, purity of life. Immoral living is condemned. Even if there are some believers in Christ who involve themselves in such immoral practices, they stand condemned before God and they need to repent.

But what is the solution to fornication? That we not engage in it, that we flee from it. Then listen to what Paul says, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." (1 Corinthians 7:2). Sex outside of the marriage relationship is sinful and therefore it is condemned by God. If one is not married then he or she must control their sexual appetite and wait until marriage to express their sexual desires.

I hope you will think seriously about these matters. It is true that many bad things are going on around us but we don't have to be a part of it. We can live right whether anyone else does or not. But by setting a good example, and by teaching God's will to those that we know, then perhaps we can help to better the situation around us and to help make the world a better place in which to live. Remember that this is in our interest, and in the interest of our children, and their future, and above all, this is God's way and therefore it is right.

THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

STEPHEN FLATT

MOST PEOPLE who identify themselves with Christianity have preconceived notions regarding baptism. Many migrate to

extremes. Some people, for example, consider baptism to be important, but not essential for accepting the grace God offers through Jesus by baptism. At the other extreme, some claim baptism is a work of righteousness one would add to faith to give them right standing before God.

The important thing is not what preconceived notions any of us bring; the important thing is what the Bible says about baptism. Consider several key scriptures related to this subject to understand what God wants us to know about baptism.

KEY SCRIPTURES ABOUT BAPTISM

Matthew 28:19-20: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (NIV).

This passage indicates baptism is an integral part of the making disciples process. The phrase rendered "in the name of" was not a religious term in the original language. It came from the banking/commerce industry and was commonly used to refer to taking something out of one account and putting it into another.

When one is baptized, he or she comes under new management; when you are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are, in essence, being transformed into a new ownership relationship with God.

Mark 16:15-16: "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"

Notice the connection between faith and baptism. From this passage you cannot say baptism is more important than believing, but you cannot say it is less important either. The sentence construction clearly shows that the effect of baptism presupposes faith. Baptism is powerless if it is not of one who believes.

The negative clause indicates that if a person does not believe, he will not even bother to be baptized. But there is no indication from this passage that baptism is a step added to faith. Instead, the idea is that baptism is an expression of faith. A person will either do both - believe and be baptized - or will do neither.

John 3:3-5: "In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'How

can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.'

One of the key points of baptism is its association with the work of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16; Acts 2:38). In this passage Jesus makes it clear that He did not come to bring a little religion; He came to bring new life. Jesus said unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Why would we think baptism is that water and Spirit birth? Beyond the obvious symbolism, consider these New Testament passages:

Acts 2:38: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Among other things, Acts 2:38 shows baptism as the place where the water and the Spirit meet. Baptism initiates the cure for the guilt and power of sin. In baptism we receive the washing away of our sin, but we also receive the Holy Spirit to give our lives the power to turn in a new direction and to overcome sin's temptation in the future.

Critics of baptism's necessity have great difficulty with this verse. Fearing that linking baptism and the forgiveness of sin somehow teaches that man saves himself, they have looked for alternative interpretations. The most common has been "repent and be baptized because of the forgiveness of your sins." That is, baptism is something you do after you have been forgiven.

There are major problems with this interpretation. First, it obviously twists what Scripture says. For example, the same word construction is used in Matthew 26 where Jesus is instituting the Lord's Supper. In verse 28 He says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." How many people believe Jesus' blood was poured out because sins had already been forgiven?

The second problem with that interpretation is the word "repent." Is repenting or turning from sin something you do after forgiveness? No, turning from sin is what one does to seek forgiveness.

Finally, the context of the passage will not allow the because-you-have-been-forgiven interpretation. The Jews who heard this first sermon were convicted, cut to the heart. Peter had persuaded them that they had slain the Messiah. Their response - "Brothers, what can we do?" - obviously refers to what they can do to be

forgiven. Peter responded with repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus. The context is that which you can do to be forgiven.

Acts 2:38 affirms that two of the many promises connected to baptism are the cleansing of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 6:3-4: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

The word "baptize" literally means "to immerse" or "to dunk." Surely God chose this response to the gospel so that the picture would look like what it represents. We are reenacting the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ when we are baptized. That is a critical statement because our new life is the result of our identity with Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Paul does not say, "You believed into the death of Jesus" or "You repented into the death of Jesus." He said, "You were baptized into Jesus' death."

Do not misunderstand. The Bible does not teach that water takes away sin. The basin of water did not remove Pilate's iniquity. First Peter 3:21 says, "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The blood of Jesus is the only detergent that can cleanse away a single sin. But we must somehow, in the expression of our faith, come in contact with that saving blood. Scripture teaches that contact happens when we are baptized into His death.

1 Corinthians 1:13-15: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized into my name."

This is a passage that many who strongly believe in baptism like to ignore because at first glance Paul's words seem to discount it. The critic says, "See? Paul says he's glad he didn't baptize anybody."

Paul is not denouncing baptism; he is denouncing denominationalism in its purest form. Paul is condemning the practice of following the man instead of following Christ (v. 12).

In context Paul's whole argument presupposes the importance of baptism. In the early church baptism was so important that some people began to have the administrator of their baptism become

the object of a special allegiance that even rivaled the lordship of Jesus Christ. Who baptized you is not important, but why you were baptized is important. You were baptized into the One who was crucified for your sin in order to become His disciple.

1 Corinthians 12:13: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

This passage talks about baptism as it relates to membership in the Lord's church. Although the phrase "joining the church" is often heard, but biblically, upon baptism, a person is added to the church (Acts 2:41).

When you are baptized into Christ you are baptized into the body. In other words, you were added to God's church by your birth into it, and God Himself does the adding. We are all baptized by one Spirit into one body.

Galatians 3:26-27: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Paul connects oneness with Christ with the moment a person has been baptized. It is interesting that this passage appears in the Galatian letter. Throughout this epistle, Paul opposes a salvation-by-works mentality. Yet in the middle of this anti-legalism treatise Paul says that everyone who was baptized into Christ was clothed with Him.

Every good blessing in the New Testament comes to those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:14). You can believe baptism places you in Christ without believing you were saved by works.

Ephesians 4:4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit -just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Hearts are broken at the disunity of people who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. There are millions of people who believe these things, yet they are fragmented all around the world. Paul lists the cornerstones of unity, and notice the august company baptism keeps - one body, one spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. How presumptive it is to assert that baptism is of little or no importance at all.

Titus 3:5: "He saved us, not because of righteous things we

had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

What a wonderful summary about the role baptism plays in accepting the grace God offers. In one verse, Paul declares that baptism is not part of a works system. Rather, it is a washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a God-ordained faith response where God acts. Baptism is a picture of absolute surrender and submission where God cleanses and imparts new life.

These verses do not begin to impart all God has to say about baptism. However, they give a clear picture of its necessity and its purpose. Let's conclude with five key thoughts that stem from these scriptures.

KEY THOUGHTS ABOUT BAPTISM

1. Baptism is essential, not optional. Surely that is clear. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God." Jesus did not say it is unlikely; He said it is impossible. The only way you can be in God's kingdom is to be born into it - of water and the Spirit. Your sins are washed away, and you are clothed in Christ.

2. Baptism initiates new life. One of the clear messages that baptism sends is the defiance of humanism. Humanism says, "I'm okay; you're okay. We just need to educate ourselves out of a few flaws." To the contrary, baptism says that humankind is deeply and mortally flawed by sin. We do not need a new direction; we need a new life, and that new life begins with the new birth. Something radical and profound happens at baptism.

3. Baptism is a God-ordained expression of faith. This point is essential to understanding the role God wants baptism to play. Throughout the Bible God has always ordained faith expressions that He wanted to release His power and His grace. It has always been something simple and seemingly bizarre. For example, staring at a bronze serpent on a pole in Numbers 21, walking around the wall of Jericho in Joshua 6, dipping seven times in the Jordan River in 2 Kings 5. In each of these examples and in many more, God demanded faith, but He also demanded an expression of that faith according to His will.

Too many people have allowed the denominational world to define faith as belief. That posturing forces one to link baptism to a work of righteousness and would be at odds with passages like Ephesians 2:8-9. No. Baptism is God's mandated expression of

faith in the soul-saving work of Jesus Christ.

4. Baptism is a call to unity. There is one baptism and through it we are baptized into one body and have one Lord. When you are baptized, you are neither slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female. We are all one in Christ Jesus. It is so tragic that something God designed to unify His church has been used by the devil through the centuries to bring division.

5. Baptism is a statement of allegiance. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul talks about obeying the gospel. Certainly you do that when you are baptized into Christ based upon your belief in Him. But do not get the idea that concluded obedience. Baptism is not the end; it is the beginning. Scripture refers to it repeatedly as a new birth. Baptism, then, initiates the lordship of Jesus Christ in your life. It places Jesus at the helm of your boat and allows Him to guide your journey all the way to your heavenly home.

THE BENEFITS OF BAPTISM

JEFF JENKINS

DURING THE infamous reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, a great famine threatened Rome. Many starving people would come to the seashores anxiously awaiting the merchant ships to arrive with food. When the ships arrived, over and over again their hopes were dashed by a cruel discovery. The emperor had commandeered all the trading vessels in Rome to bring sand for his gladiators arena. In an act of complete indifference, Nero had neglected the need of his people for the sake of frivolous recreation.

On one of these occasions, a ship owner turned to his ship master and commanded him to take his ships to Alexandria and said, "This time, I want you to bring nothing but wheat and corn. Do not bring one pinch of sand. People are dying, and my ships, from this day forward, will be committed to bringing what the people most desperately need."

We are living in a time when people are starving for the Bread of Life and thirsting for the Water of Life. But in many places, they are being fed a diet of philosophical sand and speculation. Whether you live in a city, a small town, a village or in the country, the crying need of the hour is that the masses might be brought to Christ.

It is time for men to be like the men in Issachar's day who understood the times and knew what God's people needed to do

(1 Chronicles 12:32). We need to be like Ezra, who was told by King Artaxerxes as he held the scroll in his hand to make decisions based upon the wisdom of God (Ezra 7:14). It is time for us to give people the wisdom of God, which includes the benefits of baptism.

Benefit One

The first benefit of baptism is the forgiveness of sin. In Romans 3:23, Paul said, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NKJV). The Bible makes it plain that man is a sinner. In Acts 2:38, people who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost were cut to their heart and asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

The Bible describes forgiveness of sin in a number of ways. In Romans 6:7, Paul said, "He who has died has been freed from sin." In Acts 22:16, when Paul was recounting his conversion, he stated Ananias came to him and said, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Baptism is the way we receive forgiveness of sin. It is the way our sins are washed away.

Benefit Two

We receive redemption from the guilt of sin when we are baptized. We are living in a world where there are many broken lives and broken hearts shattered by the devastation of guilt.

David understood this long ago in Psalm 51 when he prayed to his Father, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (v. 2). The guilt of sin was heavily weighing down the heart of David. He had amassed a mountain of iniquity and understood clearly what God meant when He said that a person can receive the forgiveness of sins, the redemption from guilt.

In Hebrews 9:14, the writer says the blood of Christ cleanses us from our conscience of doing wrong. When we are baptized, we come in contact with the blood of Christ; when we come in contact with that blood, the cleansing of our conscience takes place.

Peter wrote that obedience is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21). If you want to help people who are struggling with guilt in their lives, teach them what God's Word says about obedience to Christ because it is through baptism that a person receives cleansing from that guilt.

Benefit Three

We are in Christ. Just as surely as we have all sinned, the Bible teaches that the only way we have forgiveness of those sins is by being in Christ. Both Galatians 3:26-27 and Romans 6:3-4 state we are baptized into Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul writes that the ministry of reconciliation has been committed to us, and it is our duty to make sure that we are involved in this ministry.

The first thing Paul says about it is "all things are of God" (v. 18). That means it all begins with God. God initiated our forgiveness. God is the one who wants us to have the forgiveness of our sins. We could not in our own minds and hearts come up with some way whereby We might be able to be brought back to God, where we might be redeemed. Paul said God is the one who initiated it.

Paul is talking about a new birth. He is talking about putting off the old man and putting on the new man. God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ. In our world, we are doing a disservice by feeding people philosophical sand if we let them believe that we have no part in our being reconciled to God.

Paul said, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you [we beg you] on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (v. 20). Why would Paul say to these people, "we implore you," if they would not need to do anything at all? Reconciliation is through the work of substitution: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God" (v. 21). God took His Son, the only spotless, perfect being who ever walked this earth, and allowed Him to die for sinful man. Jesus never committed one single sin. But Paul says God took Jesus and treated Him like He was a sinner so that sinners might be treated like we are not. That is the work of substitution.

The ministry of reconciliation is complete only when we are in Christ. The only way to be in Christ is by being baptized into Christ. Whenever you are baptized, you are baptized into Christ, and that is when you receive this great benefit.

Benefit Four

When we are baptized into Christ, we become a part of the Lord's church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "On this rock I will build My church, and the gate of Hades shall not prevail against it." That church was prophesied again by Christ in Mark 9:1 when He said there are some of you who are standing here who will not

taste death until you see the Kingdom come with power. It was going to be in the future. Then in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost that power did come. The Holy Spirit descended upon those men when they preached the Word of God, and people were pricked in their hearts. They were convicted of sin and they were baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sin. They were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

Jesus said "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). We need to be proud that when we are baptized into Christ, we become a part of His church. Christ loved the church so much that He gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). We need to teach people that you become a part of the church by being obedient to Him in baptism. When we talk this way, we are accused of being narrow-minded, arrogant, proud, radical, judgmental and intolerant. One brother said recently that if you talk this way, you are an idolater. One preacher said those who believe there is one church and that you become a part of one church by being baptized into Christ are suffering from an illusion of innocence.

Was Paul suffering from an illusion of innocence when, six times in writing, he said there is one body? Was he suffering from an illusion of innocence when he said three times that the one body is the church? It is not arrogant to talk about the fact that Jesus gave His life for the church and we need to be obedient in baptism to become a part of that church. It is not arrogant to say that Christ adds us to His church when we obey Him.

It is the height of arrogance to say it does not matter, to ridicule and mock those faithfully preaching what God's Word teaches about baptism and how one becomes a member of the church, and to be critical of the thousands of congregations around the world standing for truth.

Benefit Five

In Galatians 3, Paul said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (vv. 26-27). When we are baptized into Christ, we receive the benefit of being called children of God. Sometimes when people talk about the family of God around the world, they want to say that people who have faith, whether they act upon that faith or not, are a part of the family of God. Paul said you are sons of God if you have been baptized into Christ. It is by an act of faith.

One preacher among us has said, "Whenever I see a man who

calls God Father, I see a brother." That is not what Paul said, and just because we make such a statement does not make it right. A brother is a person who has been obedient to Christ and has been born again into the family of God, not just an individual who calls God his Father.

Can you imagine Peter coming to Cornelius in Acts 10 and saying "Here is a God-fearing man who gives to the poor, and he has a great family, why do we need to tell him to be baptized?" Peter knew Cornelius could not be saved, regardless of how good he might be, until he was baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins.

When a man stands before thousands of men and asks them to call out the name of Jesus Christ rather than the name of their denomination, it does not make them brethren unless they have been baptized. Jesus said, "Not everyone that says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Peter understood Cornelius was lost until he surrendered his will and came in contact with the blood of Christ. There are many good people in the world, but they are not our brothers and sisters unless they have been baptized into Christ.

Benefit Six

When we are baptized into Christ, there is joy in heaven and on earth. In Luke 15:7, Jesus said when one sinner repents there is joy in heaven and "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God" (v. 10). Whenever people become a part of the church, they understand what Jesus was talking about when He said there is joy in heaven. Every time a person is baptized, there is rejoicing in the midst of the angels in heaven. The angels are sitting or standing in heaven, looking down on this marvelous occasion, saying, "Isn't God wise?"

Whenever somebody obeys Christ, there is also joy on earth. In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Many people in the world say we have to love and follow Jesus, but do not want to be told what the Bible says.

You can't love Christ and refuse to listen to His Word. You can't love Christ and not keep His commandments. In 1 John 3:24, John says, "He who keeps His commandments, abides in Him."

KEEPING ALL GOD'S COMMANDS

True joy in the earth comes from faithful obedience to all the

commands of God. When we preach about issues such as abortion, homosexuality and men who have abdicated their roles as Christian fathers and husbands, we are dealing with some of the wickedness in our world. But the worst form of wickedness in our world today does not consist of any of those things. The worst form of wickedness today is the perversion of God's truths.

Many times, people in the church are indifferent to that fact. They treat that with indifference, as if, somehow, all of these other things like talking about abortion and homosexuality are important, but other commands like baptism insignificant or harmless, as if the right interpretation of the Scripture was somehow unnecessary. Many people are giving away everything that is at the heart of what defines our faith. We cannot do that. It is spiritual suicide.

There will not be a church to fight against all the other things if we do not teach the truth of God's Word. The ability to distinguish between what is false and what is truth is absolutely critical. We cannot speak or guard the truth if we don't understand the truth. It is not our obligation to try to find out what is culturally relevant. It is our duty to take God's Word and bring it to bear upon society. People are lost and need to know the truth about the teachings of God. The truth of God transcends all cultures.

We live in a time when many people want to depreciate sound doctrine. They tell us we need to be more loving, but the idea that confronting sin or error is not love is just not a true idea. If I love somebody, I have their highest good in mind. I am going to teach them that if they want to receive spiritual benefits, they will be obedient to the Word of God.

Paul said there will come a day when people will want to have their ears tickled. They would accumulate for themselves teachers who would teach them what they wanted to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). What we need to teach is God's Word to the heart and mind, which will bring God to people throughout our world. People really are starving for the knowledge of God. We better give them what they need, not a ship of sand.

It will give us joy because we know we have obeyed the Word of God. It will give us joy on earth because we know we had a part in helping change the course of eternity. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Paul said, "For what is our hope, or joy or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." Whenever someone is baptized into Christ, we rejoice because we understand the course

of eternity was changed. Everything pales in comparison to the joy of helping somebody go to heaven.

The most deadly virus in our world today is not HIV; the most deadly is the SIN virus. The two are similar because both destroy everything in their paths. But they are also different. There is no cure for HIV, but for SIN there is a cure, and we have it. It is being washed in the blood of Christ. If somebody came up with a cure for HIV, we would get up and tell everyone. We would publicize it all over the world. So how dare we have the only known cure for SIN and not take it to the lost and dying people of our world?

THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS

Hebrews 13:15

MACKLYON

"THE FRUIT of our lips," comes from one of the several admonitions given in the conclusion of the letter to the Hebrews. To put the verse in its context, consider that Hebrews was probably written sometime between A.D. 65 and 70 to Christians of Hebrew background suffering severe persecution for their faith in Christ. From such passages as 3:12-19; 4:1-11; 6:1-9; 10:19-25 and others, we know some of these disciples were considering turning back to Judaism from which they had been freed by Jesus Christ. Perhaps some had already turned back.

The purpose of the epistle was to encourage and exhort them not to give up, but to "hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (3:6 NKJV), hold fast their profession (4:14), and hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised (10:23 NASB).

Its purpose was to encourage them to be "not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (10:39).

The writer logically and systematically moves from one argument to another showing the superiority of Christ and His way over all that was important and dear to them in the Jewish religion. Christ is superior to the angels, to the prophets and even to Moses. His covenant has better promises than Moses'. His priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world, is a better sacrifice

than that of animals slain on Jewish altars. The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, but the blood of Christ does. The writer shows that the ceremonies of the tabernacle and temple worship were merely shadows or types of the spiritual realities in Christ and His church.

HEBREWS 13:15

"By [through] Him [meaning Christ, see vv. 12-14] therefore [a conclusion drawn from what has been said] let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of [our] lips, giving thanks to His name" (KJV).

"Let us" appears 13 times in Hebrews. "Let us therefore fear" (4:1); "Let us labor therefore" (v. 11); "Let us hold fast our profession" (v. 14); "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace" (v. 16); "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith" (10:23); "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (v. 24); "Let us lay aside every weight" (12:1); "Let us run with patience" (v. 1); "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (v. 28); "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp" (13:13); and "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise" (v. 15).

"Let us," expresses plurality. The idea is community - all of us. Whether the Hebrew Christians were in one congregation or several is unknown and immaterial; it is joint-participation.

"Offer up a sacrifice of praise" is an obvious reference to the offering of animal sacrifices under the Mosaic economy as mentioned in verses 10-13 and in 7:27. But this is to be a sacrifice of praise. Only here and in Jeremiah 17:26 and 33:1 are sacrifices of praise mentioned in the Bible. Such praise may or may not be musical.

"To God" is an offering to God - to none other - not to the members of the congregation for their pleasure, not to the secular community as an entertainment attraction. It is an offering to God.

"Continually" also appears in Hebrews 7:3 where, in describing the priesthood of Melchizedek, the writer says, "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." The idea here is not uninterruptedly but endlessly.

"The fruit of the lips" is the only time this expression appears in the King James Version of the Bible. Elsewhere, "lips" appears five times in the New Testament (Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6; Romans 3:13; 1 Corinthians 14:21; and 1 Peter 3:10), and each time it is a reference to the speech organ of the body; from this verse we

learn lips are the instruments of praise.

"Giving thanks to His name." Often in the New Testament we find the expression "His name" meaning His person. For example, in Acts 15:26 after the Jerusalem meeting of the apostles and elders on the question of Gentile membership without circumcision, the letter was written to the church in Antioch. In it men were mentioned who "have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." In Acts 26:9 Paul told Agrippa, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." In Romans 2:24, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles."

We have learned from this brief analysis of Hebrews 13:15 that whatever comes through our High Priest Jesus Christ, let us, all Christians, never stop offering the fruit of our lips, our sacrifice of praise to God, giving thanks to Him. All other New Testament passages agree, including Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; and 1 Corinthians 14:15 which indicates singing as praise.

The biblical evidence is in and has been for 1900 years. God has spoken. The musical praise of the New Testament church was congregational singing. It was not the four-part harmony as we know it in congregations of the 20th century. That came later. It might have been antiphonal or responsive singing, but it was congregational singing without a mechanical accompaniment. It is still congregational, and it is still singing which is the fruit of the lips, as Hebrews 13:15 says.

Scholarship supports our conclusion. For example, in the opening paragraph of his book, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Revised Edition), Everett Ferguson says, "According to the New Testament evidence instrumental music was not present in the worship of the early church. Singing incontestably was present in the corporate life of the early Christians (1 Corinthians 14:15, 26; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19), and this was rooted in the practice of Jesus with his disciples (Mark 14:26). But there is no clear reference to instrumental music in Christian worship in any New Testament text" (p. 1).

Then, after Ferguson has given careful, lengthy and thorough study of the question from every possible perspective, in his conclusion he says, "There are good historical, theological, and musicological grounds to engage only in a cappella music in public worship. This is safe, ecumenical ground that all can agree is acceptable. Instrumental music cannot be confirmed as authorized in the text of the New Testament. It did not exist in Christian worship

for centuries after the New Testament. Vocal music is more consistent with the nature of Christian worship. ... Although the author has tried to be cautious in drawing conclusions, he does hope to have demonstrated that only a cappella music in the public worship of the church rests on good biblical, historical, and theological grounds" (p. 95).

It is not my purpose to argue the case for a cappella music in Christian worship from other scriptures, history or restoration material. Suffice it is to say that mechanical music was not introduced into Christian until the fourth century. While it is generally believed to have been introduced in some ways into church music in the eighth century "it was perhaps as late as the 10th century when the organ was played as a part of the service" (Ferguson, p. 81). The Eastern Orthodox church has never accepted it to this day.

Despite the opposition of their leaders, instrumental music was carried over from the apostate Roman church into most Protestant denominations, and in every case it was the cause of much controversy. The Presbyterians were among the very last to accept it, and some of the best discussions of it were written by them. The newer denominations, the charismatic groups, that came out of the old line Protestant denominations accepted instrumental music without controversy.

The earliest efforts at restoration of the New Testament church were in Europe around 1788, then later in America, and mechanical music was not used in any of these congregations until the mid-1800s. Bringing it into the worship divided the congregations and resulted in the formation of the Disciples of Christ denomination and from them the Conservative Christian Church. The use of mechanical music in praising God has always been disruptive of brotherly love and peace and has without exception resulted in discord and division.

APPLICATIONS

With a full acceptance that God has ordained acapella music and that instrumental music has been divisive and disruptive, notice these admonitions.

1. "By him [Jesus Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15). There is no valid reason for abandoning what the Scriptures so plainly teach. As Ferguson has said, "This is safe, ecumenical ground."
2. Let us not be intimidated. Despite what we are being told,

holding fast to the word of truth is not being divisive. It is not traditionalism in a negative sense. It is not legalism, which Jesus so strongly denounced among the Pharisees (Matthew 15:9). It is not prejudice or ignorance. We must not be deterred by name calling. The Word of God is the only doctrinal basis on which Christians can ever hope to be united. That is where we stand without the need for apologies or acquiescence.

3. Let us know that, despite the insinuations, churches of Christ are not the only religious group being troubled with these issues. For example, in the March 1998 issue of *First Things*, Avery Dulles' article, "The Ways We Worship," discusses the contemporary styles and music being introduced into Roman Catholic liturgy. He calls the debate over their acceptance as being between "the other worldly" and "the this worldly" worshipers. And so it is among us, too. In the June 1998 issue of *Current Thoughts and Trends*, three articles discuss the introduction of contemporary music in the worship of other groups and the disruption such is causing.
4. Let us not be distracted from our divinely given mission and purpose. Entertainment or amusement is not the church's mission or purpose. The church is God's predetermined agency for preaching salvation in Jesus' name to the whole world (Ephesians 3:8-11). These issues are but diversionary efforts of the devil to keep us from evangelizing the world. Let us resolve not to be so diverted.
5. Let us, with all lowliness, meekness and longsuffering, forbear one another in love, and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Two hours before my wife died, she asked for prayers. She said to me, "When I am gone and you go back to the house, you go to my desk and in the center drawer, in the blue folder, there are my requests for my funeral service. I am not holding you to doing what I ask if you don't want to do it, but that is the way I would like it." What would you have done? We did everything precisely as she requested it. Wouldn't you do the same?

The night before He died, knowing the hour was approaching, Jesus Christ made His last request for you and me -all who would believe on Him through the ministry of the apostles - that we all might be one, as He and the Father are one, that we might be one

in Them, that the world might believe that God had sent Him. He said, "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). Shame on anyone who tramples on our Savior's dying prayer and divides a congregation of His people over what he admits to being a "non-issue" - a matter of his own opinion or his own likes.

A MOST UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTER

BYRON NICHOLS

EVERY MIRACLE is great, but to give sight to one born blind just seems to be extra special. John chapter 9 tells of Jesus having done that very thing.

It is important that we take note in verse 1 that the man was blind from birth. Jesus took pity on the man and anointed his eyes with clay and told him to go wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. At the end of verse 7 John very matter of factly states that the man did as he was instructed, *"and he came back seeing"*. How remarkable that such a miracle could be described with no fanfare whatsoever!

Verse 10 records the beginning of what may well have been the most questions that had ever been asked of this man who up to now was just "that blind beggar", but who now has become the center of attention. The people asked how he had been made able to see, and he told them exactly what had taken place.

It appears that the people soon reached a point where they felt that the situation was too much for them, so they took the man to the Pharisees (verse 13). The Pharisees proceeded to ask him the same question, *"How did you receive your sight?"* The man's answer was simple and to the point—*"He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see"* (verse 15).

Some of the Pharisees said that Jesus could not possibly be from God, having violated the Sabbath by doing this act on the Sabbath. However, other Pharisees were honest enough to question how such a miracle could be performed by a sinner. Thus, there was a significant division among them (verses 14 and 16).

The next move by the Jews was to quiz the parents of the man, doubting that he had actually been born blind (verse 18ff). This poor man had been unable to see all of his life, but we now find that he had another major problem—his parents loved their standing in the

synagogue much more than they loved him (verse 22). Refusing to get involved, they chose instead to just throw their own son to the Pharisee wolves — *"He is of age; ask him"* (verses 21 and 23). The Jews then confronted the man, trying to intimidate him, telling him to glorify God by denying that this so-called sinful man, Jesus, performed this miracle (verse 24), but he was relentless.

Verse 25 is indeed a jewel! This fellow may not have had much education, but he displayed an ability to determine what is really important—*"One thing I know; that though I was blind, now I see."*

This marks the beginning of a progression of boldness and courage, even aggressiveness, as the man grows more and more weary of their refusal to face the facts and admit that Jesus actually gave him his sight. He is astounded by their admission that they don't even know where Jesus is from, yet He performed this great miracle (verses 29 and 30)!

This incredible man even proceeds to preach a short sermon to the Jewish leaders, thought by many to be the Sanhedrin itself (verses 30-33). His lack of fear is amazing, and he shows himself to be a man of some understanding of God. The man's disregard for the leaders and his audacity in speaking derisively to them certainly did not go unnoticed by those proud leaders. Their immediate reaction to his little sermon was to cast him out (verse 34).

Up to this point this man had lived his entire life in complete physical darkness, but he didn't have much trouble at all in coming to see Jesus for who He really was, that is, *"the light of the world"* (verse 5).

This was an honest man. He was willing to change his thinking when confronted with additional information. Notice the progression of his faith. In verse 11 he simply refers to Jesus as *"A man called Jesus"*. In verse 17 he called Jesus *"a prophet"*. After Jesus explained that He was the Son of God, verse 38 says that the man told Jesus that he believed that Jesus really was the Son of God, and then he worshipped Him. This was indeed a man of character.

SOME LESSONS FOR US

(1) This man born blind came to see things that others were blinded to. The more he was exposed to Jesus, the more impressed he was. The more he saw and heard from Jesus, the more convinced he was of the greatness, the uniqueness, and the divinity of Jesus. (2) This man gave us a most impressive example of courage to stand for right and against wrong. (3) He further displayed an unusual willingness to embrace truth.

I, for one, am deeply grateful for this most unforgettable Bible character!



OUR PLEA LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18). That congregations of the one church of the Bible everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the Church. (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands of salvation are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men which contain doctrines and commandments of men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

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