

BAPTISM SAVES US

By Mark Lindley

The title of this article may seem startling to some. It may cause some to shake their heads in unbelief. The question is, does the Bible teach that “baptism saves us?”

I know that many preachers preach that baptism is the “first act of obedience” after one has been saved, but that “baptism has nothing to do with your salvation.” However, according to the Bible, baptism comes “before” salvation. It is something that one does to be saved, not something one does because he is saved already.

It is clearly a contradiction to say that “baptism saves us,” and to affirm that “baptism does not save us.” Either both statements are false, or perhaps one of the statements is false and the other is true. But both cannot be true. The statements clearly contradict one another.

Suppose I could produce a verse from the Bible that teaches that “baptism saves us.” Would you believe it? I would like to think that those reading this article would

trust the teachings of the Bible. Consider the following statement made by the Lord’s apostle, Peter: “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:20,21, KJV.) Did you notice those six words from verse 21? “Baptism doth also now save us!”

The analogy Peter gives is this: In Noah’s day, eight souls were “saved by water,” just as water baptism also now saves us. Answer the following question please: according to Peter, an inspired man of God, what does baptism “do?” It does something. What is it? It “saves” us! That means that baptism comes before one is saved from sin. This fits perfectly with

the rest of what the Bible teaches about baptism: baptism is “for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38); baptism is the point when one’s sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), et al.

Please do not allow someone to prejudice your mind against this clear teaching of Scripture by “twisting” it. Also, be aware that some would charge that people who believe such teaching about baptism believe in “water salvation.” That is just an attempt to prevent you from accepting what the Bible actually says about baptism.

I have been a member of the church of Christ for thirty-six years and have never heard anyone preach that the power to save is in water. The power is in the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 1:7.) But it is in baptism that a sinner receives the benefits of that blood and is saved. (Romans 6:3,4.) Please consider these matters with an open mind and an open Bible.

— Ripley, MS

A CITIZEN OF TWO WORLDS

By Danny Tunnell

The Christian has dual citizenship; earthly and heavenly. Paul talked about looking not “at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” He went on to say that if our earthly bodies are dissolved, “we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Corinthians 4:18; 5:1.)

Jesus talked about this home in John 14:2: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” The faithful child of God has an earthly home and a heavenly home.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36.) His kingdom is within the hearts of all true believers. (Luke 17:21.)

Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life are citizens of heaven. (Revelation 21:27.) They have been born again, or born from above. Jesus

said, “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3.)

Paul debated within himself about whether to go home to be with the Lord or to stay on this earth longer. He said to depart and be with Christ would be far better. (Philippians 1:23.) Yet he thought it better to stay for his brethren’s sake.

Thank God! His children can experience “some of heaven” while on earth. He gives His followers a love that enables them to love even their enemies. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5.)

In God’s kingdom the one who is greatest is the servant of all. (Mark 10:44.) The Lord’s kingdom is not a democracy where the people govern, but a Christocracy where Christ is the supreme authority. In God’s kingdom, God is our Father; Jesus Christ is our Brother; and the Holy Spirit is our abiding Comforter.

The Hopper family from North Carolina penned these thoughtful words:

Jesus promised He was going to prepare us a mansion,
We’ll move in it when the earth shall set us free;
Living on earth but every day we’re closer to heaven,
For we know that where He is, we too shall be.

I’m a citizen of two worlds and it’s hard to choose between them.
I live here but my home you cannot see;
I’m a citizen of heaven where I’m going to have a mansion,
My real home right now is calling me.

Sometimes now it seems that I don’t feel at home where I’m living,
Sometimes I just wanna pack and move away;
I’m just like old Paul, I’m in a strait between going and staying,
But I’ll keep working for my Lord till I move away.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

WHAT’S NEEDED IN SYRIA

By David Sproule

We are hearing a lot about Syria in the news these days, and none of it is good. What is happening in Syria is very serious! Here is a nation that has been engaged in a horrific civil war for more than five years, a war which has claimed the lives of more than 250,000 people. Whatever the cause of this violence and however it might be reported, it ought to arrest our attention to hear of that many souls being killed!

But I want you to know that I have the solution! Now I’m not a diplomat or a politician or a military strategist or a sociologist, but I know exactly what is needed in Syria to bring an abrupt end to the vicious brutality that has caused millions to flee for their lives. Here’s the short of it: If “Syria” today could have what “Syria” of 2000 years ago had, things would be much different!

Syria needs the fame of Jesus! At the end of Matthew 4, Jesus was making His way through northern Palestine, “teaching. . . preaching the gospel. . . and healing.” (4:23.) “Then His fame went throughout all Syria.” (4:24.) Other translations say, “The news about Him spread” (NASB); “And the report of Him went forth into all Syria.” (ASV.) The only sure, proven and long-term solutions for peace is the good news about Jesus and His kingdom. Isaiah prophesied of nations beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. (Isaiah 2:2-4.) Syria needs the good news of Jesus Christ!

Syria needs strong churches! As Paul began his second missionary journey from Antioch of Syria, “he went through Syria . . . strengthening the churches.” (Acts 15:41.) These congregations had already been established and were growing, but they needed further encouragement to stay true to the Lord and to fight against the wiles of the devil. A strong church can influence a whole community for good. Syria needs faithful and fervent congregations!

Syria needs servant-hearted Christians! On his way to Jerusalem, at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul “sailed to Syria . . . And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days.” (Acts 21:3,4.) Paul stayed in some hospitable Christian’s home for seven days. When he left, “they all accompanied us, with wives and children, until we were out of the city,” which was a common send-off of Godspeed. “We knelt down on the shore and prayed . . . and they returned home.” (21:5,6.) These brethren served Paul’s every need. Syria needs servants of Christ!

The situation in Syria could turn around instantly if the good news of Jesus could be spread by strong churches made up of servant-hearted Christians! Actually, the situation in America could turn around instantly and the situation in our homes could turn around instantly by the same process!

— Palm Beach Gardens, FL

THE ANSWER IS CHRIST

By Bobby Key

Have you become despondent? Are you discouraged? Has your faith grown weak? Does your spiritual battery need to be recharged? Likely, what you really need is a good dose of God’s spiritual medicine . . . the Gospel of Christ. You need to be in Bible Study and Worship services regularly.

In the long ago, Jeremiah declared, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” (Jeremiah 10:23.) We live in an hour when the foundations of civilization are crumbling, the night of apostasy is deepening, lawlessness runs wild to its awful climax, the powers of atheism increase and abound, and wars and troubles circle the globe. The trail of tears through which humanity has passed since Adam is marked by the milestones of countless failures. Oh, how we need a guide in these troubled times! We need a guide who knows the way; a guide who knows where we need to go and how to get there.

We have such a guide if we would only listen to His voice. Our guide is Christ. He can solve all our problems. Without Him our nation will die, our homes will dissolve, and our souls will be forever lost in a devil’s hell.

To survive this crazed generation we must get back to God and His Way. We must accept the Bible and follow its teaching. The only hope and cure for mankind’s sin and misery rests in the precious name of our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord.

One day all the redeemed and blood-washed shall be gathered home to God, to live forever in the house not made with hands. Will you be among that number?

— Miami, OK

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power . . . If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 2:8-10; 3:1-4.)

RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION

By Milton Smith

We often emphasize the need to display love and gentleness anytime we are attempting to teach another soul. Peter writes in his first epistle, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." (1 Peter 3:15.) Here Peter strongly emphasizes the need to teach with "meekness." This word carries the idea of gentleness and kindness. Paul writes of "speaking the truth in love" in Ephesians 4:15.

But there are other times when a teacher might need to display a degree of boldness; perhaps even a spirit of rebuke. We clearly recall that Paul rebuked Peter on one occasion. (Galatians 2:11-14.)

Our best examples of the occasional need for strong rebuke comes from none other than the "Prince of Peace" Himself. Jesus often displayed the nature of one of his titles: "the Lion of Judah." One of these occasions was when Jesus drove the money-changers out of the temple area when he recognized their sinful racketeering. Jesus became so angry on this occasion he fashioned a whip, poured out the changer's corrupt money, and overturned their tables. (John 2:13-17.) Many will also recall that Matthew's 23rd chapter contains some of the strongest rebukes ever uttered by Jesus, and his rage was directed towards the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus labeled as "hypocrites."

While we generally do not like to display anything but gentleness when we teach others, we must recognize the fact that boldness often has a proper place in teaching.

Blatant false teachers should never be pampered. Paul wrote some of his sternest rebukes towards false and dangerous teachers. Let us not forget that it is often necessary for a parent to be very stern towards a child whom they dearly love. When we attempt to teach others, boldness can certainly have its proper place. We should never be timid in presenting the truth, and often teaching the truth involves exposing error. If Jesus occasionally became "the Lion of Judah," we know that we need to sometimes show this same type courage and fortitude. But the child of God should always do so with genuine love for human souls.

— Tulsa, OK

Editorial . . .

IF PETER CHANGED, SO CAN WE!

By Dalton Key

The Bible encourages us to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath," and to "take heed how (we) hear." (James 1:19; Luke 8:18.)

A young Simon Peter often struggled in this area of speaking and hearing. He was usually the first among the apostles to speak up, on most any subject, at most every opportunity, but too often he spoke when he should have been listening.

When Peter, along with James and John, witnessed the remarkable Transfiguration of Christ, he should have felt content basking in the glory of the moment, with eyes and ears open and mouth firmly shut. But, alas, this was not Peter's way of doing things! He just had to say something, even something glaringly wrong. His impetuous speech, demoting God's Son to the level of mere men, was so grievously in error that heaven's reproof came thundering forth from a cloud. Had the apostle been more interested in listening than in speaking, he not only would have avoided divine correction; he almost certainly would have learned something as well. (Matthew 17:1-6.)

This wasn't the first time the apostle had created such a problem for himself. Just a few days earlier, Peter had actually rebuked the Lord, resulting in this curt and cutting correction: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23.)

And yes, this was the same Peter who would later rebuff his Master by blurting out, "You will never wash my feet!" (John 13:8.) And shortly after making that misstep, Peter foolishly dismissed the words of Jesus, brashly boasting, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble . . . Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matthew 26:33,35.)

The good news? Peter changed. Peter grew. Peter developed. He became a tremendous force for good in the early New Testament church.

But first, he had to learn a valuable lesson: there is a huge difference between having something to say and having to say something.

Peter changed. So can we. But will we?

(EDITORIAL NOTE: Make a note and remember the date: June 1-3. This will be the time for our Old Paths Family Encampment held at the site of Flint Hills Bible Camp, just outside Sedan, KS. Our theme: "Thy Will Be Done." For more information, write in care of this paper or call (918) 587-4023 or (620) 660-5425



"WHAT DO THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST TEACH?"

By Luke Yates

Sometimes people ask me, "What does the church of Christ believe?" or "What do the churches of Christ teach?" Honestly, that's a very loaded question because the church consists of the people of Christ (Acts 11:22; 1 Corinthians 12:27) and people of Christ have all sorts of different beliefs and teachings. When answering the question I try to clarify and say, "The Bible teaches . . ." or "God teaches that . . ." or "I am a Christian and I believe . . . but I cannot speak for every member of the church."

The church is the pillar and ground of truth. (1 Timothy 3:15.) The church originated out of truth, but the church is certainly not the creator of truth. Because local congregations are autonomous (self-governing), one congregation of God's people might teach something different than another congregation of God's people. Sometimes those differences fall within the realm of opinion and God certainly

allows room for opinion on various items. (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8.) Other times those differences fall within the realm of God's commands. (1 Corinthians 14:33-37.) If there is a difference in teaching on the very commands of God, then that is a problem. God doesn't want such division and opposition in His church. (1 Corinthians 1:10.)

Regardless of what different local congregations teach, the fact that one congregation teaches one thing while another congregation teaches another thing does not change truth. God's Word is truth (John 17:17), and God's Word will always be truth (1 Peter 1:23-25), no matter what man tries to do to it. (2 Peter 3:15,16.)

You want to know what the churches of Christ teach? That's a good question. Depending on who you ask, you may get some variations to that answer. Because of that possibility, I don't want to know

what the churches of Christ teach. I want to know what the Christ of the church teaches! He has all authority (Matthew 28:18), not His church. He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28), not the other way around. He is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), not us. May we never get this reversed in our thinking.

Don't blindly follow what any member of the church says. Test them to make sure what they believe and teach is in accordance with the Word. (1 John 4:1-6;

1 Thessalonians 5:21.) If you really want to know what each individual congregation of the Lord's church should believe and teach, go back to the source. (Hebrews 5:8,9.) If you want to know what should be practiced in the church today, go see what was practiced in the church of the New Testament. (1 Corinthians 4:17.)

— Neosho, MO

Being Friends of the Poor

By Joe Slater

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). We find many of them in the Old Testament book bearing that name. In general, a proverb makes a point with a short, memorable saying. Sometimes it warns against sin or foolishness; other times it may describe a sad but true real-life situation.

For example, Proverbs 14:20 says, "The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor; but the rich has many friends." Of course not all poor people are hated by their neighbors; this proverb, like many others, is a general statement which admits of exceptions. But Solomon had observed, as most of us have, that people often despise the poor while cozying up to the rich. It is a purely selfish behavior – sad, but true. Those poor people over there can't do anything for me; in fact, they need my help (which my selfish soul resents), so I despise them. But this rich fellow over here can help me get what I want, so I'll treat him like my best friend.

Sickening? Yes, but it happens. Winners of the lottery, Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes, etc., routinely find themselves bombarded with calls and

letters from "friends" and maybe even long-lost relatives they never knew they had!

I'm glad the next proverb comments on this first one: "He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he." (14:21.) Yes, it's true that people often despise the poor; but such ought not to be, and those who act that way sin against God! From Genesis to Revelation, God has always expected His people to demonstrate compassion to those less fortunate than themselves. Mosaic Law was jam-packed with commands to help the widows, orphans, foreigners, and others who were disadvantaged or poverty-stricken. In the Christian age, the church assisted the poor from the very beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 4:34-37, et. al.) Jesus would certainly agree that the one who has mercy on the poor is blessed (happy). He challenged the rich to invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind to their feasts, rather than limiting the guest list to their wealthy friends. (Luke 14:13.)

Because Jesus taught that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," the

apostle Paul labored not only to provide for his own needs, but to help others; and he challenged the elders at Ephesus to do the same. (Acts 20:34, 35.) Let us accept that challenge as well. Help people who cannot repay you. That's what Jesus did; as members of His spiritual body, let us go and do likewise!

— Justin, TX

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