

# **BIBLE WARFARE**

## **HOW TO DEFEND YOUR FAITH**

**ANSWERING THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS  
ASKED OF MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. THE BASICS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. ONLY THE CHURCH OF CHRIST SAVED?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3. MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT BAPTISM AND FORGIVENESS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>4. 4 PRINCIPLES OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>5. WHAT MAKES THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST UNIQUE? – PART 1</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>6. WHAT MAKES THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST UNIQUE? – PART 2</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>7. USING PATTERN THEOLOGY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>8. IS CHURCH ATTENDANCE / BAPTISM MANDATORY?</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>9. WHAT OTHER RELIGIONS TEACH ABOUT SALVATION</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>10. CHURCH ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>11. GARDEN OF EDEN AND NOAH'S FLOOD QUESTIONS</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>12. HOW CAN GOD DIE IF JESUS IS GOD?</b>	<b>120</b>

# 1. The Basics

## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR SUCCESSFULLY SHARING YOUR FAITH

This study is designed to help you defend your faith against questions from non-believers or comparisons by people who belong to religious groups that may claim Christ as their leader, but do not carefully follow the teachings of the New Testament. In America seventy-eight percent of the people say that they are Christians, however that seventy-eight percent will include many who simply claim a belief in God but don't actually know the Bible, haven't been baptized and couldn't tell you exactly how they were saved or why they belong to the church they attend, if they even attend church services regularly.

Hopefully after this study you will find the scripture or teaching that answers your friend's question or your family's objection about a particular issue. In the end you are going to be stronger, more confident, and more knowledgeable about what the Bible teaches about specific issues and subjects. Hopefully, you'll be able to answer with intelligence and love the questions and challenges put to you by those who are not members of the church but wonder why you are!

## **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT**

In any type of warfare there are rules of engagement. One of the main reasons for this is so that the outcome of the war can be determined with the least amount of damage and loss of life as possible. This is why the wounded and prisoners are cared for, why civilians are restrained, but not massacred, leaving the soldiers to fight it out.

Another reason is that if you don't fight by the rules and you lose the war, the revenge extracted upon you may be severe. Similarly, in Bible warfare there are also rules of engagement for the protection of all, and to help the discussion move forward in a productive manner.

Realize, however, that these rules are not written down or listed in the Bible. They are merely examples and helpful guides developed over a long period of time teaching and debating other people on the topic of religion. What we will study does not include all of the possible rules either, hopefully you'll be able to provide some from your own experience as well.

Alright, with that said, let's look at some of the rules of engagement when it comes to discussing or debating Bible, religious or faith issues.

### **Rule #1**

## **Understand that People are Sincere in their Beliefs, Whatever Those Beliefs are.**

Regardless of the religion, philosophical system, faith experience or understanding of the Bible - if a person uses this in their interpretation of the world and life in general, realize that this is important to them.

Just because it is different from ours, even wildly different; even if we see it as totally anti-biblical, we do great harm to our personal credibility if we assume that their views are less important to them than our views are to us.

There have been many people who have died as martyrs for causes and beliefs that are non-Christian, even atheistic in nature. For example:

- **Buddhist monks** burned themselves alive protesting the U.S. presence in Vietnam
- **Japanese kamikaze pilots in World War II** would crash their planes into U.S. warships on purpose, because they sincerely believed that their Emperor was divine and this suicide mission would guarantee their afterlife.
- **Islamic extremists commit suicide** in the promotion of Islamic religion believing that their death in this manner will guarantee their entry into Paradise.

These few examples demonstrate that members of the Church of Christ don't have a corner on sincerity or zeal when it comes to religion or faith. Even the pagans who lived in the land of Canaan before the Jews sacrificed their own children to their gods as a sign of their faith.

When we begin a discussion about the Bible with a person that we disagree with (whether it's a disagreement about the very existence of God or a dispute over a minor point of doctrine) we have to begin by understanding and respecting the fact that the other person feels as strongly about their point of view as we do ours. We must also remember that it will be as difficult for them to change their minds as it would be for us to do so should the circumstances be reversed.

The Apostle Paul says that *"we should speak the truth in love,"* Ephesians 4:15, among ourselves as Christians. I don't think I would be twisting the Scriptures if I said that we should expand this to our communication with those outside of the faith as well. We should, therefore, speak the truth in love when discussing or debating matters of faith with others because they are as sensitive as we are about these matters and without a loving approach we could wound or offend them.

Some might say that it is impossible to share the faith, correct error or teach the word without offending someone somehow. That brings me to a second rule.

## Rule #2

### Stick to the Bible

We get into more problems and emotional turmoil because we go from discussing what the Bible says or doesn't say about a matter, to judging opinions, habits, traditions, and feelings. For example,

In commenting on the Roman Catholic practice of having a religious service at midnight on Christmas morning someone will call it "crazy," "useless" or "dumb." However, for those who grew up with this tradition and practice, such a comment would be extremely insulting, hurtful, and unproductive.

As Christians, our task in regards to other people, whether they be fellow Christians or people who follow other religions or complete atheists, our task is always the same. It's very clear, it's easy to understand, but because of our sinful natures and ignorance, not always easy to do.

Our task is given to us in Matthew 28:20 by Jesus, He says that we must "teach them to observe all that I commanded you." This task does not involve our feelings or our opinions, only the Word of the Lord – the Bible. There are some very important reasons for rule number two.

#### A – It's Biblical

Sticking to the Word is how the Word itself tells us to debate and discuss with others about faith.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;  
- II Timothy 3:16

- Paul tells a young preacher, Timothy, that it is the Word of God that has the ability to instruct someone in matters of faith (teach).
- He says that it is the Word of God that is to be used as the standard for proving or disproving the validity and truthfulness of any idea or religious claim (reproof).

- It is the Word of God that is to be used to adjust a mistaken idea or proposal in spiritual matters (correction).
- It is the Word of God that is to be used to train a person in how to live a pleasing life before God, or how to serve Him, or how to worship Him (training).

The Bible itself tells us that we should use it in trying to convince, debate or teach other people.

## **B – It keeps the debate in perspective**

Many times, when a religious discussion gets ugly and bitter, it is usually because the exchange has become personal. Comments like, "what a stupid idea" or "that's not the way we do it at my church" or "my preacher says that you people are all going to hell."

Religion and faith are deeply personal things and just discussing them with someone else is a very risky thing. You're afraid of being wrong or looking ignorant or being rejected. Try to remember that the discussion is not between

- your church versus their church
- your faith versus their faith
- your ideas, traditions, leaders versus theirs

To be productive, non-confrontational and edifying, a religious discussion should be framed in the following perspective: "How do our respective beliefs, faith, religions, line up with the Bible?"

This puts Jesus and His Word on one side and ourselves and the people we are discussing religion with on the other. For example:

Jesus is on one side and all of us are on the other. We hold all of our beliefs, including our own, up to the light of God's Word. That makes us partners in the search for truth, not adversaries.

So, a simple example of this type of approach would be a discussion with a Baptist or a Methodist friend, concerning baptism. The debate would never end if it were approached with the idea that we would argue what

does the Church of Christ teach versus what do Baptists teach. The discussion becomes more fruitful and less acrimonious if we put it into this perspective. "Let's study what the Bible teaches about baptism and discuss what we've learned."

There may not be immediate agreement. The other side may not accept certain conclusions that we readily approve of, but communication will happen and God's Word will be read and discussed, and perhaps the discussion will end well with the desire to continue because there was mutual respect.

If you keep the discussion between people's beliefs and God's Word (and not between your idea versus their idea) then you have a better chance of actually teaching God's Word and will, rather than your own.

## **Rule #3**

### **Be Patient**

Some folks don't understand that just because a person understands intellectually (in their minds) the teachings of the Bible, it doesn't mean that they believe and accept (in their hearts) the teachings of Christ.

For example, the Apostles were with Jesus for three years, and yet, it took almost ten years after His resurrection for them to understand that the gospel was meant for the entire world and not just for the Jews in the entire world.

There are many obstacles that stand in the way of faith other than ignorance of the doctrines. For example,

- Loyalty to family and church group
- Culture
- The fear of change
- Love of sin and this world (John 3:19-20)
- Comfort with the way things are

When we are discussing religious issues with someone, we need to remember that all of these issues and more may be affecting the other person's response and attitude. We need to be willing to keep the discussion and the interchange going as long as the other person is willing to share and exchange ideas. So many people have been turned away from Christ because they were approached by people who were in a hurry to convert them without taking the time to understand them and their issues.

Some are won over quickly. Others, however, may have many obstacles to faith that require time for them to think through and accept the points you may be making concerning the Bible, so be patient.

## SUMMARY

When we engage someone in a discussion about religion, about questions concerning the Bible, we need to remember three rules of engagement in order to avoid bad feelings and, of course, the wasting of our time.

1. **Give people credit for being as sincere as you are.** This demonstrates true Christian love and respect (not for religious practices that may be false) but rather for people's genuine effort to serve God. Respect will set the tone of the exchange and enable the person to truly listen to what you are saying. If you offend them with your disrespectful attitude, they won't hear a word you're saying.
2. **Study God's word, not your opinions.** The biggest mistake people make in religious discussion is that they don't even open their Bibles. Find the passage and keep the debate centered on understanding what the Bible says about the issue, not the various positions of different groups.
3. **Be patient.** You are sharing in order to teach someone more perfectly the way and the Word of the Lord – this requires patience. If all you want to do is win an argument, you will need skill and intelligence. If, however, you want to win a soul, you will need love and patience in addition to skill and intelligence.



## 2. Only the Church of Christ Saved?

We started our study on Bible Warfare: How to Defend Your Faith, by listing the rules of engagement. Basic rules to help us maintain communication when discussing religious issues with our friends and families. Briefly, these are:

1. **Respect other people's sincerity.** Remember that others hold deeply and dearly their views and to disrespect that will cause a communication break down. You may disagree with their beliefs, but you mustn't be disagreeable in doing so.
2. **Stick to the Bible.** Your objective is always to understand accurately and then communicate clearly what the Bible says not what you think or feel. Questions that you are asked should be answered in this context, what does the Bible (not Church of Christ or the preacher) say.
3. **Be patient.** Different people are at different points of knowledge and at different points of spiritual maturity. Don't be in a rush, take the time necessary to teach, encourage and share. The world says, "Where there's life, there is hope." What we as Christians believe and say is that, "All things are possible with God."

I'm going to add one more rule at this point, don't be discouraged. Don't be totally destroyed if someone rejects your very best intentions and your clearest teaching. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many obstacles that keep people from believing the gospel or accepting a more

accurate teaching from God's Word. Keep trying with others to share your faith and to share the Word. Keep loving your friend or your family member even if they reject the Word.

In this way they will have a constant witness of God's love, even if they reject His truth, and in so doing you will affirm your own faith before the Lord. So much for the rules of engagement, let's get down to typical questions asked during a Bible study.

## QUESTION CATEGORIES

In my experience, the questions that come up during a Bible study tend to repeat themselves and fall into four general categories.

1. **Doctrinal Questions** – These are the type of questions that require an answer based on what the Bible teaches on a specific issue or practice. You will note that the same doctrinal questions are asked in a variety of ways, but they all require the same answer. For example, many people ask why we, in the Church of Christ, don't use instruments of music in our public worship or why we think that the Church of Christ is the only church to go to heaven.
2. **Evangelism** – Many questions deal with evangelism: how can we be more effective or how do we approach different individuals? These questions have less to do with what the Bible teaches and more with how better to teach the Bible to someone else.
3. **Bible facts** – Some questions are the kind that need an explanation of facts and social customs in the Bible and less about ideas or doctrines.
4. **Miscellaneous** – There are always questions that don't fit any category. For example, "Why are there so many religions in the world?" or "Which version of the Bible is the best?"

Let's begin with the most common questions asked of those who are members of the Church of Christ.

## CHURCH QUESTIONS

Many people ask, "what do you answer when someone says, 'the Church of Christ thinks that they're the only ones going to heaven?'" There's no easy one-word answer that can completely answer this question, because it's loaded with so many different meanings.

For example, if the question means, is only the church that is in the Bible, the one spoken of by Peter (3,000 that were baptized at Pentecost) and the church spoken of by Paul (Corinth and Ephesus) is that church the only one going to heaven? The answer is yes.

If the question is, does the Bible teach that there is only one church and is that the only church that is going to go to heaven? The answer to that question is, yes. Paul says in Ephesians 4:4 that there is only one body, the church, and only that one body belongs to Christ and only the body of Christ is going to be saved. As opposed to the body of Buddha or the body of Muhammad or the body of Krishna.

But this question doesn't usually refer to what the Bible says about the church, it is a response to a certain aggressive attitude that existed in the Churches of Christ in the past and even among some today that said the following: among those who call Jesus the Christ, only those among the Churches of Christ will go to heaven.

So the conclusion drawn from this position was that, well, if you were a Baptist, Methodist or a Catholic or whatever Christian group other than the Church of Christ, you were lost. This position was, to say the least, offensive and spawned a negative attitude toward Churches of Christ by other groups who were also calling themselves Christians and were also trying to serve the Lord sincerely.

The problem here is that the people in the Churches of Christ who promoted this idea broke all the rules of engagement in discussing their faith with other people.

## **1. They were not respectful of Baptists or Catholics' sincere belief in Jesus.**

They openly criticized and ridiculed other religious groups and accused them of ignorance and being insincere. They used public debates, books and periodicals to denounce the doctrines of other believing groups. Most of the doctrinal points that were being made were correct, the biblical arguments were accurate, but the "spirit" was arrogant and combative. The net result was that they won the battle (argument), but lost the war (credibility as sincere teachers of God's word). As a result, Churches of Christ gained a reputation which was crystallized by the phrase, "Oh, the Church of Christ, you think you're the only ones going to heaven." This phrase then is not a question, it is both a summary statement of our mistaken approach in the past and a put-down at the same time.

## **2. We also broke rule number two in reaching out to others.**

Instead of keeping the discussion based strictly on what the Bible taught on various issues of salvation, many times we made it personal. It became the Church of Christ versus the Baptists, the Church of Christ versus Roman Catholics, the Church of Christ doctrine versus the Methodist doctrine. There was a time when we adhered to the motto that said, "We speak where the Bible speaks and we are silent where the Bible is silent." We forgot that piece of wisdom and began battling others, pitting the Church of Christ against all comers and gained a negative reputation for it.

## **3. We were impatient.**

We were also impatient to convert others, thinking that intellectual conversion was the same thing as the conversion of the spirit and of the heart. We began breaking the gospel down into a formula that could be explained and memorized in five easy steps.

If people got this information and they understood it, but they didn't follow through right away with baptism we just discarded them and we moved on. We preached the formula for the response to the gospel as the actual message itself. The plan of salvation was that God sent His Son to die for the sins of man and thus offer us forgiveness based on faith not

works. The response of faith was expressed through repentance, confession, and baptism.

We practiced a scorched earth policy of evangelism which reached its zenith with the Crossroads / Boston / International Church movement that gave us some more bad publicity.

They were the ones in the 70's/80's who would infiltrate and divide churches in order to take them over. They were the natural outcome of this brash attitude of "only we are saved" mentality because they taught that if you weren't part of their discipleship movement you were not saved. What goes around comes around and our poor attitude in the past came back to harm the church in a serious way because of this movement.

This is some of the history and background behind this question. Now that you know where the question is coming from, how do you answer? Well, depending on the circumstances, (whether you have a lot of time or whether the person asking has some biblical knowledge) there are several ways to respond to, "You're the church who thinks you're the only ones going to heaven."

### **1. No, we believe that only the church described in the Bible is the one going to heaven with Jesus.**

<sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

- I Thessalonians 4:16-17

The Christians who are dead and the Christians who are alive, when He comes, those will be together and will be saved. He doesn't mention 15 different groups, just one group, the ones who are alive and the ones who were dead will be joined together to be with Him forever in the air. This is what the Bible teaches. And I believe what the Bible teaches. So that's the first part of my answer.

## **2. Only Christians are going to heaven, only Christians are saved.**

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

- Acts 4:12

Can you twist this to mean that somebody other than Christians can be saved? In the Churches of Christ, we do not say that we're the only Christians. What we say is that we only want to be Christians according to the Bible. We know that Christians are going to heaven and that's what we are striving to be, Christians, nothing more, nothing less.

## **3. The Bible teaches that not all who call themselves Christians will be saved.**

<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

- Matthew 7:21-23

The Bible and Jesus Himself say that there will be some who call themselves Christians; those who will do great things in His name, (from miracles to various ministries); those who will prophecy or preach in His name, who will not enter the kingdom. Why? Because they don't obey the will of the Father, which is contained in Jesus's word.

...I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.

- John 8:28

I know that His commandment is eternal life, therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me.  
- John 12:50

The task of the Christian is to obey all things that Jesus taught and teach others to do the same. Religion in His name, not done according to His will and word, will not be blessed, or accepted. That's the hard lesson, but biblical.

In the end, who is a Christian and who is not, who is saved and who is not, who's going to heaven and who is not, is all based on God's Word not on what Churches of Christ say or what any other group says.

He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.  
- John 12:48

And so, to summarize, when someone says you're the church that thinks they're the only ones going to heaven.

1. I begin by apologizing. I apologize for the person or the persons who gave you this false impression.
2. I then inform them that God's Word is the final judge of who will go to heaven and who will not.
3. In addition to this I'll assure them that in the Church of Christ, our number one priority is to search the scriptures carefully to make sure that we are understanding and obeying as closely as possible the things that Christ taught.
4. Finally, I ask them if there is any question or subject they'd like to study the Bible about and see if I can invite them to Bible School and worship.

Remember: respect the person, stick to the Bible, be patient.



# 3.

## Miscellaneous Questions about Baptism and Forgiveness

Each chapter in this book about how to defend your faith begins with a reminder of the rules of engagement.

1. Respect other people's sincerity even if you disagree with their beliefs.
2. Stick to the Bible and what it says about the issue you may be discussing.
3. Be patient. It takes time for people to change their minds about things in general, but especially about religious matters.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the sample questions usually asked have been divided into four categories and I will try to answer one from several areas in each chapter. The four categories were: doctrinal questions, questions about evangelism, Bible facts, and miscellaneous questions about religion or religious practice in general. These are the categories and our rules for discussion, let's begin with one question.

## **Question:**

**What scripture would best show that water baptism is necessary for salvation, contrary to the evangelical teaching that belief only, or belief in one's heart is the only thing that is necessary?**

There are two parts to this question. I will rephrase this first part in order to clarify the question as well as the answer:

## **WHAT SCRIPTURE BEST SHOWS THAT BAPTISM IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?**

There are so many passages that demonstrate baptism's role in the process of salvation that it is hard to just pick just one. I would suggest that when you discuss baptism with someone, especially someone who is a member of a Baptist or Pentecostal/Evangelical church, remember first of all what they believe about baptism in general. For example, they believe that there are still several types of baptism available today:

- Baptism of the Holy Spirit
- Baptism by fire
- Baptism in water

They also believe that the exact point of salvation is the moment that you make the intellectual decision to believe in Jesus. Everything after that is simply a ritual to explain or commemorate the completed salvation. For example, when you ask them what they think about baptism, their answer will be: baptism is an outward sign that expresses an inward and complete reality.

Some Baptists believe that once you are saved, your baptism is your initiation right into the local Baptist church. This example shows how important it is to listen and understand someone else's religious belief. Taking the time to do this will provide important information about the subject you are discussing as well as showing the sincere respect necessary to keep the communication flowing. The next step is to go to the Bible itself for the information you will share if you have the opportunity. So, what does the Bible teach about the subject of baptism?

## BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE

The Bible teaches that there is only one baptism remaining for the church to preach and practice today. More specifically, Paul teaches this in Ephesians.

There's only one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Ephesians 4:4-6

So, in discussing baptism, how many are to be practiced? Let us look at three baptisms mentioned (Spirit, Fire, water).

## BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

John the Baptist says,

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

- Matthew 3:11

The baptism with the Holy Spirit was given by Jesus to His Apostles on the day of Pentecost

<sup>4</sup> Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

- Acts 1:4-5

<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house

where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

- Acts 2:1-4

This baptism was promised only to the Apostles by Jesus and received by them at Pentecost. It was their "empowering" to do the miracles necessary to confirm the gospel of Christ and their witness of the resurrection. They demonstrated this power by speaking in foreign languages they had never learned before, a phenomenon known as "speaking in tongues." They also "empowered" certain disciples to exercise spiritual gifts by the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:18-20). However, the disciples themselves could not transfer this power to others. Only the Apostles had this ability (Acts 8:14-17). When the Apostles died, the spiritual powers they had and could transfer to others died with them, and the period of miraculous works performed by Apostles and certain disciples slowly disappeared. Soon after, the canon of the New Testament was completed and the sacred writings replaced the need for miraculous witness since now the very words of Jesus and the Apostles became available to everyone as a witness to the life, death and resurrection of the Christ. The written gospel became: "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Romans 1:16).

## **BAPTISM OF FIRE**

The baptism of fire is a biblical way of saying "judgment" or "testing." Jesus has exercised many judgments and tests since John pronounced these words. For example,

- The people who heard Jesus, but refused to believe, this was their test.
- Jesus's own suffering and the crucifixion.
- The Jewish nation was destroyed in 70AD by the Roman armies, this was their judgment by God for rejecting their Messiah.
- The persecution that the early church suffered, that was a test.

- The final judgment at the end where our faith will be examined by Christ.

All of these are the "fire" that Jesus brings upon the earth.

## **BAPTISM IN WATER**

Then there is the baptism by immersion in water that John practiced:

<sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; <sup>6</sup> and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.  
- Matthew 3:5-6

Jesus also practiced this baptism in the water.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John <sup>2</sup> (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were),  
- John 4:1-2

The Apostles practiced it.

<sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.  
- Acts 2:38-41

And the early church practiced it.

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. <sup>36</sup> As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" <sup>37</sup> [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." ] <sup>38</sup> And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.  
- Acts 8:34-39

When Paul (some 30 years after Pentecost Sunday) writes to the Ephesians and he teaches them that there is only one baptism, which baptism do you think he is teaching? We know that he is writing about the one baptism that Jesus practiced and commanded for all who wanted to become His disciples – water baptism.

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."  
- Matthew 28:19-20

One becomes a disciple through faith expressed in repentance and immersion in water. And so, water baptism is the "one" baptism that Paul taught and practiced; the one baptism that Peter preached at Pentecost; the one baptism that Jesus commanded be done until the end of time. Some refer to it as the "Great Commission" baptism because it was included in Jesus' command to preach the gospel and make disciples in Matthew 28:18-20.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit was a one-time empowering given to the Apostles (and Cornelius). Baptism of fire was a reference to God's judgment and tests, but the one baptism that Paul talks about that all must receive to become Christians is the baptism in water by immersion.

The second part of this question:

## WHAT SCRIPTURE PROVES THAT BAPTISM IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

This question can be answered once the issue of water baptism as the only baptism available has been dealt with. The key idea here is that in the New Testament every scripture where baptism is mentioned, it is mentioned in connection to salvation. Remember the issue is if baptism **necessary** for salvation.

Therefore, the best way to respond to this question is to simply go through the New Testament and examine what it says about the relationship between baptism and salvation. Any one of these scriptures would do, but when you string them all together they're even more effective.

- Matthew 28:18
  - Make disciples/baptize
- Mark 16:16
  - Those who believe and are baptized will be saved.
  - Strongest single scripture.
- John 3:5
  - Water + Spirit = Kingdom
  - Water + Spirit = Born Again
- Acts 2:38
  - Repent + Baptism = Forgiveness
  - Only forgiven are saved
  - Only forgiven receive Holy Spirit
  - This is the water and Spirit Jesus is talking about that creates the re-birth.
- Acts 22:16
  - Baptize = wash away sins
  - Only clean from sin are saved
  - Not just call on His name, but do so in and by being baptized

- Galatians 3:26
  - Faith + Baptism = Clothed with Christ; Into Christ
  - Only those clothed with or "in" Christ are saved.

There are many more but these six demonstrate that whenever the Bible talks about baptism it refers to it as a necessary part in the process of salvation along with faith. We could say that faith is expressed biblically through baptism and it is at baptism we are saved, because it is there that our sins are removed and that we receive the Holy Spirit.

## GENERAL DOCTRINE

I want to answer a couple other questions here that are from the general doctrine area, but have to do with what we've already been talking about.

### **How can we prove that Jesus was immersed when He was baptized?**

We can do that in three ways:

A. John's baptism was based on the Old Testament law of purification, which required priests to wash their entire bodies with water before they put on their vestments in the service of the temple.

Then Moses had Aaron and "his sons come near and washed them with water."  
- Leviticus 8:6

B. When Jesus was baptized, Mark writes that He came up out of the water.

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him.  
- Mark 1:10

If he were sprinkled with water or had some water poured on His head, He would have no need to physically go into the river itself. The strongest

proof is the word that the Bible uses to describe what happened to Jesus in the water. The word that the writers used was the Greek word *baptizo*, which meant to plunge or to immerse. There were other Greek words that could have been used to specifically describe the sprinkling with water (*Ekcheo*, which means to pour or *Rhantizo* which is to sprinkle). The word used by the Bible writers every time was the word baptizo (to plunge or immerse in water).

You can show that baptism is by immersion in water by using the meaning of the words or the practice of the times, even the spiritual imagery that Jesus was immersed (buried) in the Jordan when He was baptized and this is the way that He and then His Apostles and others performed the act of baptism for the very same reason. Archeologists found deep baptistries in early church buildings where repentant believers were baptized according to the instructions in the New Testament.

The arguments against baptism are a modern day phenomenon that were not heard of in the early church age.

## WHEN IS FORGIVENESS APPLIED? WHERE IS THE POINT OF GRACE?

This is another way of saying, at what precise moment are we forgiven or what precise moment are we considered covered by the grace of God? This takes us back to the point of salvation. Where exactly is the moment in time that we are saved?

- Roman Catholics claim that it is when the little baby is baptized by a priest.
- Most evangelicals and Protestants say that it is at the moment when a person believes as true the claims of Christ and they accept Him as Savior.
- More radical Calvinists teach that you're saved when God chooses you.
- We, in the churches of Christ, believe that the Bible teaches that there is a dividing line between saved and lost and that dividing line is baptism.

Now, the same scripture references that teach that baptism is a necessary response to the offer of salvation also teach that in a time continuum baptism is also the point at which we are saved. For example:

- Mark 16 – Believe + Baptized = Salvation
- John 3:5 – Water + Spirit = Reborn
- Acts 2:38 – Repent + Baptize = Forgiveness

The argument that people make when this is explained is that by making baptism (which is a physical act) the point of salvation, you are going back to a works system rather than a "grace" system. In other words, baptism is like a work of the Law and no one will be saved through works of the Law.

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.  
- Romans 3:20

Those who make this point misunderstand both how grace operates and what a "work of the law is." Grace is God's kindness and mercy in offering us salvation through faith in Christ, rather than salvation through perfect law keeping. A work of the law is any attempt to atone for our sins or achieve righteousness without reference to Christ.

Baptism is not a work of the law because in no way is it an attempt to atone for sin or an act to achieve righteousness or right standing with God. The only act that atones for all sin is the cross of Jesus Christ.

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.  
- 1 Peter 2:24

The only act that produces total righteousness (or makes us acceptable before God) is the act of faith,

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

- Romans 3:28

Baptism is the physical act that expresses our faith. God has always required a physical response to demonstrate or to confirm conscious faith.

- **Adam and Eve** – Not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
- **Noah** – Built the ark
- **Abraham** – He left Ur. He circumcised his son. He offered his son
- **Jesus** – Death on the cross
- **Apostles and all the disciples since then** – Baptism

The main dispute over this issue is this: evangelical and others claim that the "act of faith" is mental assent to the gospel (I decide that I believe and I say, "come into my heart Jesus"). We, in the churches of Christ, believe that the Bible teaches that baptism is the "act or the response of faith" at which point a person receives the benefit of faith, which is salvation.

Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

- Acts 22:16

In this passage we note that Paul has both seen and heard the Lord Jesus and has even spoken to Him. He is blinded by a miraculous light and then given his sight back by another miracle. He is taught the gospel and also given his future ministry as a minister to the Gentiles. At this point he believes the gospel and accepts that Jesus (who he formally persecuted) is truly the Messiah, the Savior. And yet with this belief and insight Ananias still says to him, "And now, why do you delay? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins.

He believed, he accepted as true, but he was still unforgiven of his sins until he expressed his faith in the way that God required it, through baptism.

Peter says it this way:

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
- 1 Peter 3:21

So the point of forgiveness, the separation from death to life is found in the waters of baptism.

<sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.  
- Romans 6:3-4

We go from death to life in the waters of baptism.



# 4.

## 4 Principles of Personal Evangelism

As always, we begin our study with the rules we try to follow when discussing faith or religious issues with other people:

1. Respect others' sincerity, even if you don't agree with their beliefs. This means listening politely while they talk and try to explain. If you listen well, this will encourage them to listen well when it's your turn.
2. Stick to the Bible. The most important and productive way to begin an answer to a question is "I believe that the Bible teaches." Your responsibility is to give them God's Word; accepting it, believing it, acting upon it is their responsibility, not yours.
3. Be patient. It takes weeks to grow a tomato. Imagine how long it might take to grow a person's faith. Your love is shown by your patience.

Let's continue with typical questions.

## EVANGELISM

One of the categories of questions was that of evangelism. Several of the questions in this area had to do with various approaches to take with people of different religious backgrounds; and how to become evangelistically minded. For example:

- How do you approach people who don't believe in God or who used to believe but they don't now?
- How do you respond to a Jewish person or a Mormon?
- How do you deal with those who feel that they condemn other people if they believe, especially their parents?

All of these are different people and situations, but there are some common elements in each. What I'm going to suggest here are some basic Bible principles that can be applied to each situation. There is no single verse that says, "this is how you approach a Jew/Roman Catholic/Mormon/etc."

The best place in the Bible to find information about evangelism is in the book of Acts. This is the eyewitness account of the establishment of the early church and how it went about in its effort to evangelize the world. In this book we see real people overcoming all kinds of obstacles (language, religion, persecution, immorality of great proportions, lack of resources, etc.) and they still succeeded in winning souls.

Now, the questions that were asked all had the same obstacle in common, and that was a different belief system.

- One was a Mormon
- Another was a Jew
- One was a Protestant/ Roman Catholic
- Some who believe that there is no God

In the Bible we read accounts of Paul and others going out to preach in the world when there was no such thing as Christianity and the only

people they talked to were people who belonged to other religions. For example:

- Jews who held that the Old Testament and the Mosaic law was their rule of life.
- Greeks whose idea or whose direction or philosophical ideas were established by the Greek philosophers and they were polytheists, they believed in a multiplicity of gods or semi-gods.
- The Romans were involved in Emperor worship.
- Various pagan beliefs (Nature religions; People worshiped trees, the sun and stars, or they had gods and goddesses, i.e. Diana of Ephesus.)

The names and the details of these religions are different than today, but like today they didn't accept the Bible as God's Word, nor did they know or accept Jesus as the only divine Lord and Savior.

We've been given no other plan or approach in evangelism than the principles and approaches provided in the New Testament. So let's review these and apply them to today's obstacles.

## **Principle #1 – Prayer**

- Before Jesus sent the 70 out and later chose the 12 who would go out and evangelize – He prayed (Luke 6:12).
- Before the Apostles began their great ministry of evangelism beginning in Jerusalem – they were gathered together in prayer (Acts 1:12-14).
- Before the church sent out Paul and Barnabas to begin their great missionary effort – the church prayed for their success (Acts 13:1-3).
- When Paul's ministry was roadblocked or in doubt, when he encountered opposition to the message – he responded with prayer (Acts 16:25).

Prayer is the first step because it acknowledges the truth about each situation:

- God is the One Who is in charge
- We are only the servants
- Our friends and family need God and Christ and we are placing them directly into His hands through prayer

Through prayer we remove ourselves as the force through which the conversion comes (our intelligence, our arguments or approach) and we place the gospel of Christ and the efforts of the Holy Spirit as the key elements that bring about conversion.

- Romans 1:16 – "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."
- Romans 8:28 – "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called "according to His purpose."

So, for each question or case presented I would say that you should begin by making that person or situation a regular subject of your prayers. In this way you are establishing the correct relationship between yourself, the other person and God. And we are creating the best environment for the next principle in the biblical approach to conversion and teaching.

## **Principle #2 – Proclamation**

When faced with a tremendous array of opposing belief systems, the Apostles simply began by preaching the gospel (Acts 2:1-38). They didn't start by trying to explain how Christianity was different than Judaism or how the doctrines of Jesus compared to the teachings of other religious leaders. In other words, they didn't begin with debate or comparisons, they began with proclamation.

Obviously there is a time and a place (and this is what prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit provides) but when the opportunity comes we need to share with our atheist, Muslim, Roman Catholic or Methodist

friends and family – the reason for our faith. This gospel can be reduced to the following three statements:

A. I believe the Bible teaches that Jesus, the Divine Son of God, proven to be so by fulfilled prophecy and miracles and His own resurrection, died on the cross to atone for all of my sins (and yours too).

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,  
- Romans 3:21

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
- Romans 1:4

B. My own resurrection and eternal life is made possible not by perfect obedience, but rather by faith in Him, which is expressed in repentance, baptism and faithful discipleship.

He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.  
- Mark 16:16

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."  
- Acts 2:38

You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.  
- Matthew 10:22

C. Jesus is the only person through whom a person can be saved and thus have a relationship with the true God of heaven.

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.

- Acts 4:12

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

- John 14:6

When you simply proclaim the gospel you set the agenda for further discussion, you set the standard against which other beliefs will be tested. The gospel message has power (Romans 1:16) for salvation because only it addresses the principal issues that all persons deal with, whether they are atheists, non-Christians or believers who require further teaching in the true doctrines of Jesus:

- Personal sin and failure
- The desire to know the true God and His Will
- Fear of death and the hereafter

Instead of debates and polite discussion and comparisons of doctrines and practices (worship, traditions, etc.) when you get the chance, just lay out the gospel itself and let them deal with it, not you. They may simply refuse to respond or simply reject it altogether and if they do then at least you know that you've given them one thing they needed most, the one thing that truly has the power to bring them to God and save their souls; and you fulfilled your spiritual duty on their behalf.

You're responsible for proclaiming the gospel, not for their decision or the response – that's their responsibility.

If you have the opportunity (whether it's in a conversation, an invitation to a Bible study or worship, giving a book / video / bulletin article / BibleTalk.tv website) opportunities are the result of our prayers and

God's response through the work of the Holy Spirit. If you have an opportunity, the goal is to proclaim the gospel; if you've done this then the next principle comes into play.

## **Principle #3 – Perseverance**

Note that in the Bible, Jesus and the Apostles continue to preach and teach many of the same people over and over again. Jesus spent three years in close company with His Apostles, repeating the same message. The Apostles, especially Peter and Paul, actively proclaimed the gospel and encouraged the Jews to believe and accept the truth.

We look for some kind of silver bullet that will convert each different type of resistant belief or disbelief. We want a penicillin-type scripture reference that will win over a Catholic, or transform a lifelong Muslim into a Christian.

Even Jesus, with His perfect teaching and miracles did not win over Nicodemus in one sitting. It took years for this Jewish teacher to accept Christ and then only secretly.

Our best chance comes when we begin with proclaiming the gospel, and keep the dialogue going by discussing how the various parts of the gospel affect or compare with the other person's religious life or beliefs. Of course, that's if they want to continue or to follow up on the discussion. If they do, then at least you're sharing what is truly essential and important. For example:

- The atheist might take exception to Christ's divinity and this would lead him to deal with all kinds of evidence that points to Jesus as divine.
- Catholic, Protestant and the Mormon individuals would certainly take exception to the proper response required by God (adult repentance, immersion, lifetime fidelity) for salvation and this would lead them to a deeper understanding of the primary authority of Scripture over tradition or church rule.
- The Muslim would stumble over the fact that Jesus is the only way to salvation and this would force him to examine the

credibility of both Muhammad and Jesus to see which one is the true and final Messenger and Savior.

We need to remember that "ignorance" is no excuse, no one is excused from judgment because they didn't know or no one taught them the truth.

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

- Romans 1:18-20

Proclaiming the gospel, therefore, is the best favor we can do for someone, and persevering and discussing and teaching them the details and the demands of it is truly an act of faith and love on our part. So whether they stumble over it or they're saved by it, they need to hear it as many times as possible and we need to first proclaim, then persevere by explaining it as long as they'll let us.

And in doing so we need to remember that Jesus, the Apostles, and every Christian since has had a mixed response:

- not everyone wants to hear
- not everyone will believe
- not everyone will respond, no matter how many times you repeat it. That's their failure, not yours.

## Principle #4 – Patience

It took the Apostles 10 years to figure out that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It took the Jewish Christians 20 years to accept the Gentiles as equal partners in Christ. It took me 30 years to obey the gospel. Some situations and prospects look hopeless. And they look like this because we discount both the power and the plans of God.

In the early church no one would have thought that Saul, the crazed Christian hunter, could ever be converted. Not the person who was sent to him to proclaim the gospel to him (Ananias - Acts 9:10-13). Not even the Apostles themselves would believe that Saul had been converted – even after he had been baptized!

What happened to this man?

- Did Ananias debate him? No.
- Was he impressed by the sacrifice and the martyrdom of the Christians that he persecuted? No.

God is the one who dealt with Paul on the road to Damascus and prepared him to hear the gospel, which he believed and responded to, when it finally came time. Now, I'm not saying that God appears miraculously to certain "hard to convert" people to prepare them for the gospel. What I am saying is that God has many ways of preparing our hearts to receive the good news.

- Sometimes it's the loving kindness of a Christian friend or family member or co-worker
- Sometimes it's a close call with death
- Sometimes it's the sudden realization of how heavy our burden of guilt is
- Sometimes it's losing somebody we love
- Sometimes it's the overwhelming goodness and kindness we experience that causes us to search

In these and a thousand other ways, God is continually drawing men and women, continually wooing us to search for Him, to find Him in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit's great work in the world is to bring things together to draw all men to God. Our prayers also serve this purpose. Our work and ministry are like signposts that point the way for those who have begun to search.

We need to be patient, however, because sometimes it takes a long time to bring a prodigal home. Sometimes they have to go to the deepest

depths before they begin to search for a way out. Sometimes being patient and letting God do His work is the only thing left for us to do.

If this is the case, we need to remember and trust that God will do everything to save your friend or your family member, because

He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- 1 Timothy 2:4

Regardless of the religion or the lack of religion, the best way to evangelize any individual is to follow the pattern for evangelism in the New Testament.

1. Pray for the lost specifically
2. Proclaim the Gospel
3. Persevere in teaching and example
4. Patiently wait upon the Lord, for His ways and His judgments are perfect



# 5. What Makes the Churches of Christ Unique?

## PART 1

This book is concerned with answering Bible questions that I've been asked about topics that many have not been able to answer or where students wanted more detailed answers to their queries.

I've divided the questions into several categories and answer one often repeated question or several specialized questions in each chapter. So far we've tackled the most asked questions first. In addition to this, we've also set up ground rules to guide our discussions with other people when we talked to them about Bible or faith issues:

1. Respect others' sincerity
2. Keep the discussion based on the Bible
3. Be patient

## CHURCH QUESTIONS

One of the questions that came up in many different forms was, "What is the difference between the church of Christ and \_\_\_?" You fill in the blank between any number of groups or denominations - Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Methodist, Jehovah Witnesses, etc. I've put all of these questions together because the essential difference between the Church of Christ and other churches (whether they be Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant, evangelical, or sectarian groups like the Mormons) is always the same. In the simplest of terms the difference is this: we are consciously striving to be a New Testament church and they are not.

Oh, some (especially among the evangelical churches) may claim to be New Testament churches but they neither understand nor practice true New Testament style Christianity and church organization.

And so, the question that naturally follows this statement is: "What, then, is a New Testament church?" The answer to this question has two parts: theological and historical.

### A. Theological

New Testament churches (like the Church of Christ) are different theologically than others because our approach to the Bible, the source for Christian theology (the study of God and all that relates to Him) is different than other groups in two basic ways.

1. We believe that the Bible is completely inspired by God and is the only and final authority in spiritual matters.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.  
- II Timothy 3:16

This difference is readily seen when considering the Roman Catholic Church for example. They believe that the Pope and church tradition has equal authority to the Bible. On the other hand, some Protestants don't accept all the Bible as inspired and include the teachings of their founders (Calvin, Luther, etc.) as authoritative. Evangelicals, for the most part,

agree with us on this. Various sects give equal authority to their prophets and founding leaders, as they do to the Bible.

When you have one church that considers the Bible as the only and complete inspired, authoritative document from God; and then other groups who only accept parts of the Bible or they include information from other sources as authoritative, you're bound to have different outcomes. For example:

- We believe that homosexuality is a sin and it is an unacceptable lifestyle, because this is clearly taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27).
- Many Roman Catholics believe that homosexuals can remain this way without change because the Pope has made a special provision for them in the church. The most recent Pope has accepted the idea that there is a genetic source for homosexuality. A claim that has yet to be proven scientifically.
- In some Methodist and Presbyterian churches, homosexuals can become ordained ministers, because many of their leaders do not consider the epistles of Paul as being inspired. Many in the denominational world see Paul's epistles as simply the work of a human being, and a prejudiced human being at that!

I choose this example because it is so glaring. However, there are a thousand other differences because we, as a New Testament church, see the Bible as fully inspired and consider that it is the single authority for religious practice, and others take away some parts of the Bible, change it, add to it or dismiss it altogether.

When you do this, you end up with a different result and conclusion on issues of faith and practice. For example, if I don't believe that the writings of Paul are part of the inspired record, then I can use instruments in worship, have women preachers, organize the church like a business or the government as many churches do, because most of the information on these matters come from Paul's epistles and if they're not inspired or authoritative then I can do what seems best to me.

Of course, the Bible does say something about this as well,

Do not add to His words  
Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar  
- Proverbs 30:6

Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.  
- I Corinthians 4:6

<sup>18</sup> I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.  
- Revelation 22:18-19

Notice that Solomon, Paul and John restated the same idea, that God forbids any tinkering with His Word - no adding, no subtracting and no changing. Churches of Christ, as New Testament churches, take this command literally and we accept the entire Bible as inspired by God and are careful not to add, change or eliminate any part of it. This approach to the scriptures makes us different than other groups claiming to have faith in Christ.

I'm not saying that we understand everything in the Bible or that our teachings are all without fault. I'm saying that we accept the fact that the Bible itself is perfect and fully inspired and we are doing our very best to understand and obey all of it as it is written.

2. Another practice that creates differences between us and others from a theological perspective is our approach to interpreting and applying God's Word in our lives in practical ways. For example, Roman Catholics see the Bible as a basis from which to begin their religious ideas, which are then developed by papal teaching in addition to church practice and tradition (in some instances even if it contradicts the Bible). Catholics add

festivals, doctrines, laws and church hierarchy not found in the New Testament. Modern Protestantism is largely driven by its academics, who have long ago abandoned the Bible as their final authority. This has led to their synods, associations or conventions becoming the place where church matters are decided, many times by majority voting rather than by strict adherence to the teachings of the Bible, especially the New Testament.

Evangelicals have subjectified the Bible. They've personalized it to fit each group. For example, Jesus is one's personal savior (not in the Bible) and Evangelicals have made Christianity a personal religion (Americanization). You have Bibles for singles, African Americans, teens, men or moms etc. For Evangelicals, the Bible is a resource book (a good one, an inspired one) for a happy and satisfying life here and a book that gives them a glimpse into the future, heaven.

The multiplication of groups under the evangelical banner is increasing each year because as a subjective process there is no way to decide which group is legitimate or not.

The sects (i.e. Jehovah Witness, Mormon, Seventh-Day Adventists) focus exclusively on one doctrine or key idea in the Bible to separate themselves from other groups and justify their existence. For example:

- The Jehovah Witnesses – God's name.
- The Seventh-Day Adventists – the Sabbath.

From this base they develop an entirely new religious experience and group.

Note that the one thing that causes the differences between all of these religious groups all claiming Christ as Lord, is the way they approach and apply the Bible to their lives as believers, as well as their organizations and the way that they function as churches. In the Churches of Christ the Bible is our only authority and inspired guide. Because of this, we have a special way to study and apply its teachings to both our personal and church life.

This approach or method gives us the results that we have and makes us unique among every other church and religious group out there, because we, in the Churches of Christ, are the only ones using it.

## **PATTERN THEOLOGY**

This approach, this way to practice or apply our theology is called pattern theology, based on the instruction of several scriptures.

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.  
- II Timothy 1:13

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.  
- Jude 3



This is one of the new series of quarters minted with a special design of the State of Oklahoma on the back. At the mint they have the original dye or pattern for this particular coin. So long as they have the raw materials, they can produce an unlimited number of coins which are exactly like the original in every way. This idea exists in every industry - you create an original pattern and you produce any number of copies from that original pattern from dresses to steering wheels.

If we apply this idea to religion, the pattern theology approach says the following: the Bible contains all the patterns necessary to produce all facets of spiritual life. These include, but are not limited to:

- The pattern for how one becomes a disciple of Jesus
- The pattern for how to organize Jesus' church
  - This is where the term New Testament church comes from
  - A New Testament church is the church that is organized according to the pattern for church organization found in the New Testament. In pattern theology we recognize that there are patterns for certain practices because through direct communication or examples or basic logic the Bible gives us a pattern of teaching to follow.
- The pattern for proper service
- The pattern for personal spiritual growth
- The pattern for resolving issues

Examples of this are found throughout the New Testament. Just as Moses was given a "pattern" by God in building the tabernacle in the desert along with a similar pattern for the sacrificial service and the function of the priesthood, the Lord has also given us a pattern in the New Testament concerning the establishment, function, and organization of His church.

We are different from others because everything we attempt to do is done with this approach in mind. A classic example is the issue of the use of instruments in public worship. We are different than others because we are among the only ones who use a cappella singing in worship. The Greek Orthodox Church does not use instruments either because it understands the Greek language and clearly understands that the New Testament (original language - Greek) teaches that we are not to use these in public worship.

We, in the Churches of Christ, do not use instruments because when we ask ourselves, "What is the New Testament pattern for public worship?" the pattern of teaching we discover concerning this issue leads us to the conclusion that instruments are not to be used.

For example, in every passage that gives information about music and worship, the command or instruction or example is to sing without the use of musical instruments. (I Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, James 5:13).

It is interesting to note also that the specific word used in the Greek for the English term, “to sing”, was the word *psallo*, which specifically meant to sing without the use of instruments. It was the Greek way of saying a cappella type singing.

There are 181,253 words in the New Testament (King James Version) and not a single one makes any reference to the use of musical instruments in Christian worship. Therefore, the pattern of teaching in the New Testament on this subject (music and worship) shows us in clear terms that in public worship we are to sing without the use of instruments.

Here’s the point, if we want to be a popular church and reach younger people, youth groups, or Millennials, it is better to have a well-produced musical worship service with a professional group of musicians. If we want to create impact, bring in visitors, get people involved, start a band, get going with a choir.

If, on the other hand, we want to be exactly like the church described in the Bible we will follow the pattern for New Testament worship, and have the entire church sing praises to God without any accompanying instruments. This will make us different, but not because we don’t use instruments, most others do. No, we will be different because we have deliberately and consciously chosen to follow carefully and as exactly as possible the teaching in the New Testament about this particular matter.

This practice and approach doesn’t make us legalists. We want to believe that this effort makes us lovers of God because we want to do what God wants us to do, more than anything else. We don’t care about being popular, we only care about pleasing the Lord.

This is what makes us different, we are trying to follow the pattern while others are not dedicated to this objective. I’m not saying that other people are not sincere, I’m simply saying that they are not dedicated to what we are specifically dedicated to.

This is what creates the similarity between us and other people at times, we are both following the pattern about a certain issue. The Baptists believe Jesus is the Son of God and so do we. We are the same in this because they follow the pattern of teaching about the identity of Christ and so do we. What usually creates the differences and makes us unique is that the Churches of Christ are dedicated to trying to follow the New Testament pattern for everything pertaining to our spiritual lives and faith and other groups are not.

Sometimes they do it and sometimes they don't. We, on the other hand, try to do it every time.



# 6.

## What Makes the Churches of Christ Unique?

### PART 2

In this study I am answering various questions about the Bible and religion that have been asked by others. When answering these I've told you to observe the ground rules:

1. Respect the other's sincerity
2. Keep it biblical
3. Be patient

Of course, these rules can't always be practiced. For example:

1. You're being aggressively ridiculed and dismissed. Jesus said not to cast our pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6) meaning that not all are ready or willing to hear God's word. We have to know when to speak and sometimes when to remain silent.
2. The other person completely rejects the Bible or does not even want it as part of the discussion. We have no other basis to discuss Jesus and the gospel. Without the Bible in the equation there can be no fruitful discussion of religion for Christians. Paul refers to the revelation of Christ and His resurrection to the

philosophers in Greece (Acts 17:22) but when they no longer wanted to hear, he left them.

Our rules of engagement are not absolutes, they are guidelines to help us have a productive and loving communication with someone else about the Bible. In this chapter we will finish the second part of the previous question on the difference between the Church of Christ and other religious groups.

## **REVIEW - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**

In the last chapter the question was - what's the difference between the Church of Christ and \_\_\_? My first reply was the short version: the difference between the Churches of Christ and all others is that we strive to be a New Testament church and they do not. My second reply was the long version and took up the rest of the previous chapter and most of the one we're going to study now.

### **Theologically**

I tried to explain what a New Testament church was and how it was different. First of all, I said that as a New Testament church we are different theologically. This meant that we believe that the entire Bible is inspired by God and it is the final authority in religion, as well as the only authority in religion. This separates us from most other church groups, because many no longer accept this idea. When your sole authority for religion, faith and morals is the Bible, then you will reach different conclusions and practices than those who only use part of the Bible or those who give equal authority to human religious leaders or traditions.

We are also different theologically than others because of the way that we apply the Bible to our everyday lives as Christians. While others use the Bible as a resource book or a jumping-off point for their religious practices, we see the Bible as containing "patterns" for spiritual and moral living. This is called "pattern theology" and this is what we practice. In other words, the Bible contains patterns or blueprints that enable us to reproduce Bible things in any culture or age, whether that be for public worship or private life choices and practices.

For example, through various commands and examples the Bible is able to give us a pattern to follow when we wish to take the Lord's Supper: who takes it, when is it celebrated, which elements to use, how to proceed and why do it.

All of these questions about how to do communion are contained in the Bible. Pattern theology, therefore, says that the Bible contains a pattern or a blueprint for every aspect of a Christian's life (II Peter 1:3). The information contained for the Christian is complete, from how to be a good husband to how to organize the church, everything needed for spiritual life in Christ is contained in the Bible, and especially in the New Testament where the teachings of Jesus are found.

Churches of Christ are different because we try (with various degrees of success) to follow the New Testament pattern for every aspect of our personal and congregational life; and other groups do not. For example,

- We take communion by taking both the bread and the fruit of the vine every Lord's Day until Jesus returns. We do it this way because this is the way the New Testament teaches the church to do it.
- The Roman Catholic church have changed this pattern where only the priest takes both of the elements (the congregation takes only the bread) and you can take communion any day of the week.
- Most evangelical churches take communion once a month or once per year in accordance with their leaders' instruction and their tradition. But this is not how the New Testament says it should be practiced.

If you examine every difference between Churches of Christ and other groups or churches, it will invariably come down to this: we seek to speak and to do things specifically according to the pattern and teaching of the New Testament; nothing more, nothing less. Others, for various reasons, have chosen to change, delete or add laws, traditions and doctrines that cannot be supported by the New Testament. In many cases they support their practices with human thinking not divine thinking.

## THIS CHAPTER'S QUESTIONS

This covers some of the material we discussed in the last chapter. In going forward, I will try to answer questions that may arise when you attempt to explain the ideas of New Testament Christianity and pattern theology to others.

### 1. Why Pattern Theology?

Did we in the Churches of Christ arbitrarily choose this approach to Bible study and application? The answer is no. We use pattern theology for several reasons.

First, it is the approach that we see the Old Testament patriarchs and leaders use in their relationship with God and His Word. For example:

- Cain and Abel's offerings were rejected or accepted because of the way they offered their sacrifices in accordance to God's will, including the attitude of the heart and the manner in which they were offered (Genesis 4:4-6).
- Noah built the ark according to the plan or pattern given to him by God, no deviations (Genesis 6:22).
- Moses built the tabernacle exactly as God gave him instructions (Exodus 39-43).
- Solomon built the temple and instituted worship exactly according to the plans given to him by God through his father David (I Kings 5:5).

And so, in these and many other examples we see the people of God performing their worship and living out their faith and their service in accordance to the instructions given to them by God. We also see that when they did not follow the instructions, they were punished. For example, King Saul lost the kingdom because he did not follow exactly God's instructions given him by God through Samuel the prophet.

This approach of obeying and following God's given instructions is summarized in I Kings as God speaks to Solomon at the dedication of the temple.

<sup>4</sup> As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances,<sup>5</sup> then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

<sup>6</sup> "But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them,<sup>7</sup> then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

- I Kings 9:4-7

Commands, statutes, and ordinances encompass all of the instructions and judgments given by God.

Another reason for our use of pattern theology is that the New Testament also teaches that this is to be the approach we take in regards to applying the Bible to our lives.

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:19-20

We are to follow the commands of Jesus. In other words, whatever the New Testament tells us to do, we must do. For example: love, abstain from sin, take communion, preach the Word, etc.

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

- I Corinthians 11:1

Not all issues or teachings are put forth as commands or instructions (do this, don't do that). Some things we learn by copying the examples given to us by Christ and His Apostles. For example,

- How to deal with temptation and adversity
- How to worship God properly
- How to organize the church
- How to do mission work
- How to resolve problems within the church

Many of these things we learn from the pattern of examples given to us by Jesus and the Apostles and other biblical characters.

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.  
- II Timothy 1:13

Paul is telling Timothy (the younger preacher) to retain the standard (pattern = a sketch) of proper/solid teaching which Paul has entrusted to him. When doing his work, Timothy is to refer to the doctrines and the teachings which have been given to him. We have the exact same pattern of teaching from Christ through the gospels and epistles that have been handed down to us today, and we're to do the same thing, follow the pattern.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.  
- Jude 3

In this passage we note that all the teaching, sound words, doctrine, pattern, whatever you want to call it, all of it has been given to us and there is no more. And so, in the New Testament, through various commands, examples, and teachings, we have a pattern for Christian living and practice. The New Testament, through Christ and His Apostles tells us that we have the entire pattern and that we must follow it in order to reproduce the Christian life and Christian practice that God wants of us in every single age.

The New Testament even warns that there will be an apostasy (a falling away) from this approach and to guard against the impulse to change or

add or delete any of the teaching of this pattern (Acts 20:27-32). And so, through Jesus and the Apostles we have a pattern, a blueprint, in the New Testament that guides every aspect of our Christian lives. The Church of Christ is different because it tries to obey the Bible's command to follow only the pattern in the New Testament for Christian life and practice.

## **2. When Did We Start Doing This?**

Ever since the church was established and the New Testament given and circulated in the church and throughout the world there has been a constant struggle to stay true to the pattern. Even during their own lifetimes the Apostles were warning the church not to abandon this practice or to return to it if they had strayed.

- Acts 20:7 – Paul is warning the elders
- I Corinthians 4:6 – Paul is warning the Corinthians
- Jude 3 – Jude is warning the entire church

Throughout later history this falling away was experienced as Christianity fell further and further away from the original pattern contained in the New Testament, to a point where Christianity was barely recognizable anymore. Then, in the 1500s, Martin Luther attempted a return to a more biblical form of Christianity which broke the Roman Catholic denomination over its practice. His lead resulted in the Protestant Reformation which in turn gave rise to a new variety of Christian churches and practices.

Unfortunately, these quickly fell into the same mistakes as their predecessors in not following closely the pattern in the New Testament and resulted in thousands of Protestant/Evangelical and Sectarian groups that we have today. All claim Christ, but none pursue their faith using the exclusive pattern contained in the New Testament. Each have added, changed or deleted from the pattern to form their own brand of Christianity. Even today they continue to add new groups who have improvised their own style of Christianity to suit their times and purposes.

In the 1700s scholars and preachers from various Protestant groups began to preach and teach that the true and only source for Christian life

and practice was the Bible. These men left their denominational backgrounds and began to teach that all should return to the Bible and only the Bible as the pattern for Christianity. They attempted to restore New Testament Christianity as it was patterned in the New Testament. They were thrown out of their churches and disowned by their denominations but, first in Europe, and then to a great degree in the United States, the Restoration Movement, as it was called, began to catch fire.

Men like Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, Thomas Campbell, Walter Scott, and others began a religious revolution that swept the nation for almost 200 years. Eventually those who believed and practiced their faith using only the Bible came to be known as the Churches of Christ (as the Bible referred to the church in Romans 16:16).

There are now tens of thousands of congregations known as Churches of Christ throughout the world and except for language and cultural differences, they are all the same. This is because each congregation follows only the pattern in the Bible for Christian life, and the organization and function of the church.

We at the Choctaw Church of Christ are the 21st century version of this Restoration Movement and like those who came before us, we continue to pursue our Christian life by following the original pattern given to us by Christ and His Apostles in the Bible. We do it because the Bible says that this is the way we are supposed to practice our Christian faith.

### **3. Why are there Divisions even within the Churches of Christ?**

There are several groups within mainline Churches of Christ that have different practices concerning mission work, how to do the communion and the use of the church building, however, all of these remain committed to the pattern theology approach. They simply come to a different conclusion on some, not all, issues. The different groups within restoration churches:

- Mainline Churches of Christ
- Disciples of Christ

- Christian Churches
- International Churches of Christ

The reason for this division is the same as for every other division in the history of the church, a refusal to follow carefully the pattern established in the New Testament. For example,

- Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches have forsaken the principle that the entire Bible is inspired. This has led them to having instruments in worship, women as elders and ministers and other non-biblical practices.
- International Churches of Christ refused to accept the New Testament as the final authority and give their leaders more power than the Bible gives to church leaders. This has led to abuse and charges that this group is a sect.

In the end, however, the departure from principles that the Bible is inspired and contains the patterns for acceptable Christian life and practice are always what cause division and the creation of new and different churches. They're different because they are not like the pattern given in the New Testament.

Note, however, that among Baptist Churches, there are 62 different Baptist groups in the United States alone.<sup>1</sup>

Let's make sure that we remain faithful to the twin foundations of inspired text and pattern theology as the solid base for a church and a Christian life that pleases God.

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1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Baptist\\_denominations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Baptist_denominations)



# 7.

## Using Pattern Theology to Answer Questions

So far in our study we've tried to respond to various questions concerning different areas of faith, Bible teaching and religion. I've reminded you in each chapter of the guiding principles that we need to remember when having a religious discussion with someone else of another faith or even a person who is a Christian, but has a different opinion about things.

1. Respect the other person's sincerity. Their beliefs are as important to them as your beliefs are to you. People can believe something as zealously that is false or inaccurate, as they can believe something that is true.
2. Keep the Bible as your base. God's word is always a better response than your opinion.
3. Be patient. There's a time for everything even understanding and faith.

## REVIEW - PATTERN THEOLOGY

I want to begin by answering three particular questions repeatedly asked of those who are members of the Churches of Christ:

1. Why do you not use instruments in public worship?
2. Why are there no women in the Churches of Christ who lead in public worship?
3. Why do you take communion every Sunday?

In order to answer these questions properly we need to review some of the previous chapter's material on pattern theology. I told you that what distinguishes Churches of Christ from other religious groups are two main things:

### **1. What we believe about the Bible**

We believe that the Bible is completely inspired by God. We hold that all of it is inspired. We believe that it is the only inspired religious or holy book that exists. We also believe that because of these facts, the Bible is the final authority in spiritual, religious and moral matters. Now, we believe these features are true about the Bible for several reasons.

#### **A. The Bible claims inspiration**

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;  
- II Timothy 3:16

Throughout the Old Testament the writers described their writings as direct revelations from God and in the New Testament the writers also confirmed that what they were writing in their Gospels and epistles were the very words of God.

## **B. The Bible has survived attack**

From the days of the Roman Empire until now the Bible has endured and survived non-stop attacks on its credibility. While various empires, religious groups and great thinkers have come and gone, the Bible has survived intact and grown stronger in its reach and influence around the world.

## **C. The Bible is unique among books**

The Bible has been studied and critiqued more than any other single written document, and the results of these examinations have been that the Bible is unique in its insight, beauty, unity of thought and universal appeal. The Bible is a collection of 66 individual books written by 40 authors over a span of 1400 years and it tells only one overarching account without confusion or error. In this regard it is head and shoulders above any other document ever produced by man.

## **D. The Bible is effective**

No other belief system and its writings have had such a positive impact on mankind for so long as the Bible. Some may accuse Christians of doing terrible things in the name of their religion, but when you examine their acts against the actual teachings of the Bible, you quickly find that they weren't really following the Bible in their actions.

For example, the IRA of Ireland and their terrorist tactics in the name of Roman Catholicism were not in line with Romans 12 that says we're not to take vengeance on our enemies in the name of God.

## **E. The Bible contains fulfilled prophecy**

The Bible is the only holy book that contains a record of fulfilled prophecy.

"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd!  
And he will perform all My desire.'  
And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,'  
And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"  
- Isaiah 44:28

Isaiah lived 100 years before the king that he mentions in this passage was even born. There are 61 direct and fulfilled prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament, that are fulfilled exactly in the New Testament. Everything from the place He would be born (Micah 5:2) to the way that He would die (Isaiah 42-50). Only God knows the future.

Therefore, when we as the Church of Christ, say that we believe the Bible is the only true and completely inspired Word of God, we say this because we have arrived at this conclusion based on the evidence that:

- the Bible makes this claim about itself
- it has survived over 2,000 years
- it is special and unique in nature
- its impact on the world cannot be denied
- its record of fulfilled prophecies has not been duplicated in any other book

Only a document that has been divinely conceived and recorded can claim all of these features, there's no other plausible explanation. If God didn't write this book, then who did? Certainly not man.

So, to begin with, we're different from other religious groups because we believe that the Bible is completely inspired and the only authority in religion, spiritual matters and morality. Another reason we're different:

## **2. The way that we Apply the Bible**

I said that our approach to the Bible and how we apply it to our practice of Christian living is called pattern theology. Pattern theology is the belief that the Bible contains patterns or blueprints that direct our actions in every area of Christian life. We believe this because when we read the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, we see God's people consciously using God's Word in this way. Noah, Moses, Solomon, Paul and Jude all specifically taught and acted according to this principle.

There are patterns and blueprints that guide us to do the things that God will have us do, not only in how to organize the church and offer Him public worship, but also how to be a good husband, a good wife, how to

be a good citizen, how to grow spiritually or how to develop humility. These are the patterns and ways that the Bible teaches us these and other important spiritual disciplines.

These two beliefs and practice: complete inspiration and the authority of scripture, along with the presence of biblical patterns to guide us, are what set us apart from other groups. If you understand these things, you also know the principles I use whenever I'm answering a question about religious practice or Bible teaching.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **Question #1**

## **Why do we not use musical instruments in our worship services?**

This is the most asked question by people who visit and participate in one of our public worship services.

Answer - We don't use instruments in public worship because when we examine the inspired pattern for public worship in the Bible, and specifically what the Bible says about the use of music in public worship, we see that the type of music used in these cases was always a cappella, meaning singing without instruments.

When I say, the inspired pattern, I mean, "What information and direction does the New Testament give me in this area?"

There is not a lot of information about worship and music in the New Testament. It is more focused on the attitude one has in worship, rather than the mode or the style of worship offered. However, there is enough information to help us come to a conclusion.

1. Our worship is to follow the New Testament pattern, not the Old Testament pattern.
  - Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 1:1-2

- The information on worship for Christians is contained in the New Testament not the Old Testament.
2. The New Testament directs us to sing.
- There are only a few references to music in worship but in every one, the instructions are to "sing" without the accompaniment of an instrument.

What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

- I Corinthians 14:15

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

- Ephesians 5:19

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- Colossians 3:16

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

- James 5:13

Each of these verses talks about music and worship to God and each uses a word that literally means to sing a cappella.

3. The New Testament never mentions instruments in accompaniment to worship. I stated before that there are 181,253 words in the King James Version of the New Testament,

and not a single one of these refers to instruments of music in Christian worship. We sing and only sing in worship because the only information in the Bible about music in worship directs us to sing without instruments, when doing so in public worship.

When you use instruments in public worship, you are doing so without the support of the New Testament. In addition to this, there is no pattern for the use of instruments and it goes against the blueprint outlined in the New Testament for music in worship. Of course, outside of public worship, our choice of music is guided by what is moral, proper and edifying, not whether it has instruments or not.

## **Question #2, Why are there no women leading in worship or teaching adult Bible classes?**

Again, the basic answer is the same as the answer to question number one: the New Testament pattern not only doesn't show or give us an example of women doing this, it actually specifically teaches against a women taking on these roles

### **1. No examples**

In all of the New Testament there isn't a single example of any woman leading in a Christian worship service. Women like Dorcas, or Phoebe, or Lydia are mentioned and they are seen as serving, but not in a public worship service. There are, however, many references to men leading and teaching in worship services (Acts 2:42; Acts 13:1-13).

### **2. Specific Instructions**

In addition to this there are specific instructions as to who ought to teach and who shouldn't teach when the church meets.

<sup>34</sup> The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. [...]

<sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him

recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.

- I Corinthians 14:34; 37

Paul's instructions for conduct in the church.

<sup>11</sup> A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

- I Timothy 2:11-12

There are reasons for these instructions, but basically it seems that God has given the spiritual leadership role in the church to men and not to women. This has been the source of contention for 2,000 years, because it has not always been easy for weak and sinful men to be good spiritual leaders and it is not easy for weak and sinful women to submit. However, this order is the pattern for leadership in the church that God has set forth. Whether this model is popular or easy is not the point. The key is that it is still the pattern that we seek to follow in organizing the church according to God's instructions.

There are hundreds of different ministries in the local church and both men and women are encouraged to fulfill these roles as best they can. All of these except the role of elder, deacon or preacher are open to women. This is the pattern we see in the New Testament for service and leadership in the local congregation.

## Question #3

### Why do we take communion every Sunday?

Again, the answer is that we do it this way because we have examples and instructions in the New Testament to celebrate the Lord's Supper in this manner on this particular day. We know that the first day that the Apostles and new disciples took communion was on a Sunday, because in the first century the first communion taken after Jesus ascended was taken on Pentecost Sunday.

<sup>38</sup> Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" <sup>41</sup> So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Acts 2:38-42

Pentecost was on a Sunday; the Apostles and disciples first began sharing the Lord's supper on that Pentecost Sunday and afterwards we read that they continued taking communion on each Sunday.

Now, for a brief period of time while the church was in Jerusalem there is some evidence that the church took communion whenever they gathered in addition to Sunday, but this practice was replaced by a regular Sunday observance as the church spread. (Acts 20:8; I Corinthians 11:23-26; I Corinthians 16:1-2).

If we take the bread and the fruit of the vine each Sunday, we are following as closely as possible the pattern established in the New Testament concerning the taking of the communion.

## SUMMARY

Before closing out this chapter I want to give you a few guidelines in the use of pattern theology so that you can arrive at accurate and consistent conclusions in your study of the Bible.

### **1. Obedience when it speaks, discernment when it is silent.**

When the Bible explains or commands or provides an example of what it wants us to do, our response is to understand and obey. For example, we don't need 500 commands or examples to be baptized, one will do.

God gives us enough information and confirmation of information to guide us, but when we have just one or two commands or instructions about a matter, these have more authority than 10,000 commands or instructions given by human thought or opinion.

When God gives us information in His word then this is what we use, and we eliminate everything else. On the other hand, when the Bible is silent on a subject, and we can find no commands, no examples or relevant information, then we have to use Christian discernment and judgment.

For example, the Bible does not give information about birth control. We have to use Christian judgment in this matter and allow each couple to have their own opinion using the general principles in the Bible of not harming life and maintaining proper care of our bodies and budgets. In other words, when it comes to using pattern theology, we should strive to have unity in doctrinal matters, tolerance in matters of opinion, and love in all else.

## **2. Know the difference between what is cultural and what is eternal.**

There is a lot of debate over issues in the Bible that stem from the fact that people fail to discern the difference between things that were cultural in nature and applicable only in the first or second century, and those things which are eternal principles that remain always. Things like the women wearing veils, the washing of feet or meeting in homes. These and other things were subject to change because they were part of the culture and habits of the first century and they were permitted by God. The taking of communion, singing in the assembly, male spiritual leadership, among other things were specifically commanded and given by God and they cannot be changed, regardless of the culture.

So when you hear debates over various issues, ask yourself, "Is it a cultural matter or is it a spiritual issue? Once this is discerned then go ahead and see what the guideline, pattern, plan or outline in the New Testament is for these things.



# 8.

## Is Church Attendance / Baptism Mandatory?

We continue our study on how to defend one's faith and how to respond to various questions concerning the Bible or the church. I remind you of our ground rules for a religious discussion:

### **1. Respect the other person's sincerity and faith.**

Other people want what we want. They want to know and please God. I believe that this fundamental desire is worthy of our respect, even though we may not agree with how they approach or think the Bible says about certain matters.

### **2. Keep the discussion focused on the Bible.**

If you don't know what the Bible says about a topic or issue, it is acceptable to admit this and say that you will find out what they want to know and share that with them the next time you meet. It's okay to say, "I don't know." We are not expected to know everything.

### **3. Be patient.**

Not everybody is ready or able to hear what we have to share.

## DOCTRINE

Here's a question that often comes up from believers. "Do I have to attend church every week?"

- If you're a good person, do you still have to go to church?
- Is three times a week necessary?
- Where does it say that in the Bible?
- Why can't I worship alone without going to services? I go to the park on Sunday. I'm with the trees, the birds. These are all God's creation. I see the sky, it moves me to give thanks. Isn't that good?

Some have the mistaken attitude that it doesn't matter if you attend or where you attend, church is church. I hear evangelists say that all the time in their preaching. They'll be proclaiming the gospel, and they'll say, "Whatever or wherever you want to go, just make sure you go to church. It doesn't matter which church."

Another question that comes up is the following: "Who decides how often we meet? Show me the chapter and verse where it says we've got to be in church Sunday night." Most defend this attitude with the argument that it's what you feel in your heart that is important, not if you go to church or not. Again, I'm simply articulating arguments that I've heard over and over again.

Finally, the excuse that so many fall back on to justify not attending worship regularly, "The church is full of hypocrites!" No kidding. I hadn't noticed. I suppose that's what happens when you put 300 sinners together in the same room.

These are varied comments and questions, but they can be reduced to two simple issues:

1. Is corporate public worship mandatory, and if so, how often?
2. Is membership in the Church of Christ necessary and exclusive?

## IS WORSHIP MANDATORY?

If anybody says that they can worship God by themselves, or they can worship wherever or however they wish, or they don't need to attend a public corporate worship at all, they are simply demonstrating that they have not read or understood the Bible.

From the very beginning God required some form of worship from His people. It started with individual worship through sacrifice. We read about this in Genesis. The book of Genesis doesn't give us much information about how they worshipped, it simply gives us an example of these two men, Cain and Abel, offering worship to God. So, worship has existed from the very beginning.

During this time worship was practiced by individuals who offered various sacrifices to God. As the population grew worship was led by the head of the family on behalf of the family (Noah, Abraham, etc.).

After the period of the patriarchs, beginning with Moses until the appearance of Jesus, God demanded very specific forms of worship from His people. They offered worship and sacrifice to God through their priests and Levites at the Tabernacle in the desert and later on at the temple in Jerusalem. Many of the Old Testament books (Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus) are dedicated to explaining the details of the sacrificial system of worship offered by the priests and assisted by the Levites on behalf of the Jewish nation.

Following this period, Jesus through His Apostles continued this practice by giving us in the New Testament the form of worship that we practice since that time. This includes prayers, praise in songs, teachings, communion and giving.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- Acts 2:42

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

- I Corinthians 16:2

I use these scriptures to demonstrate that from the day that the church was established, worship was something that was mandated. It was taught. All the believers participated. It was explained. God didn't simply leave the practice of worship to the people to figure out for and by themselves. He gave specific instructions through the Apostles concerning the manner in which they were to worship Him.

We also note that in every period God was the One who provided the way in which He desired proper worship to be conducted. For example, Cain's worship was rejected by God. We're not told exactly why but the fact that it was not pleasing to God means that something he did or some attitude that he had was not correct, because both Cain and Abel offered worship to God. One was accepted, one was rejected. The one who was rejected obviously didn't do something right.

During the Mosaic period, the manner in which worship was performed was very specific and some were punished by death for deviating from it. An example of this is found in II Samuel. The Jews were bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem after it had been captured by their enemies. They attempted to move it from someone's home where it had been left by their enemies, the Philistines, and bring it into the capital city.

David and others with him loaded the ark on a cart and followed along with gladness and song until the oxen pulling the wagon stumbled risking the fall of the ark and Uzzah, to prevent this from happening, reached out with his hand to steady the sacred ark and was immediately killed by God for having touched it which was forbidden. We find out that later on, David returned with the Levites (who were sanctioned by God for the transport of the ark and other sacred objects located in the tabernacle) who brought long poles which were slipped through eyelets built into the ark for the very purpose of transporting it and thus safely returned it to the holy city.

At the establishment of the church on Pentecost Sunday, the Apostles immediately began to teach the new converts the manner of Christian

worship, and they continued both by example and teaching, to encourage them to worship regularly in the way that they were taught (Acts 2:42-47).

The God who created the world, the God who gave Moses the Law, the God for whom the Temple in Jerusalem was built, the God who sent Jesus, is the same God today Who was worshipped then. We don't have a new-and-improved, or a more relaxed God in the New Testament. However, some people seem to think that the Old Testament God was an angry Deity who wanted everything done by the book, but now in the New Testament, God has become more lenient when it comes to worship and allows His worshippers to do as they please in this area of Christian life and practice.

My question is this, "If He was so exacting about how and when they worshiped Him in the Old Testament, what makes us think He makes no demands of us concerning worship in the New Testament?" Nothing has changed concerning the need to offer God acceptable worship.

- The Old Testament puts it this way, Exodus 20:8, "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day." This is a commandment, so the instruction to worship is conveyed through a commandment in the Old Testament.
- In the New Testament, the instruction to worship is given to us in the form of teaching and example. We need to understand that God conveys information to us in various ways. Sometimes it's a command, sometimes it's an example or a particular teaching. However, the message is still from God. We are still bound by it. Therefore, how does God convey His will in the New Testament concerning worship?
- To begin with, God used the inspired teaching of the Apostles to train the early church in the matter of proper worship. We note that New Testament worship is simpler and requires no appointed priests or complex sacrificial system to conduct (Jesus is our "once for all" sacrificial offering never to be repeated). However, we do have various spiritual practices that make up the Christian worship required of us by God today. We note early on

that the Apostles were teaching the disciples how to worship. Acts 2:42 says the following:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

In this verse we see four of the five spiritual exercises of Christian worship - teaching/learning God's word; fellowship; breaking of bread/communion; prayer/praise. Later on in Acts 2:44-45 we note the fifth spiritual exercise of Christian worship and that is giving/sharing to meet needs.

The point is this, whether the Bible gives us instruction by a specific command, or a stream of teaching, or several examples, all of these things still have the weight of God's will. We tend to think that if it's not in a command form, then we're free to do as we will. We need to understand that an example of what we should do is just as weighty as a commandment to do what we should do.

So, in the Bible God expresses His will in a variety of ways, through commands, through teachings or through apostolic examples. Explaining this will be necessary if you wish to teach someone who asks you such a question, because their confusion usually centers around how God conveys His will. They think that if they don't see it in the New Testament as a command like the Ten Commandments then it has no bearing on our actions today. This, then is a misunderstanding about how God conveys information to us. I repeat for emphasis, anyone who feels that regular corporate public worship is not necessary, is a person who has not carefully read the scriptures or has read them, but chooses to ignore the passages that inconvenience their chosen lifestyle.

So yes, the Bible teaches that worship is mandatory, but does it teach that you have to do it three times a week? Now, in order to answer this question, I want to use a comparison to married love.

In a marriage relationship, God designed us in such a way that we must have sex at least one time in order to conceive a child. I think we all understand that. But how many of us would say that having sex once every year or two, to produce a child, would be something that would

contribute to a healthy and a happy marriage? Yet, the command or the basic necessity is that only one occasion of intimacy between husband and wife can ultimately bring a child into this world. Here's my point, in our relationship with Christ, the Bible stipulates through teaching and example that Christians should worship at least once per week, the Lord's Day, to take the Lord's Supper. This is a pretty clear teaching in the New Testament (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 10:25).

Through simple human experience, however, we have learned that the more times we repeat the worship experience, the healthier and more rewarding will our relationship be with Christ, our Lord. We've also learned through experience that those who limit their worship to the absolute minimum, usually end up falling away sooner or later. Just as in marriage, the more contact and interchange, the better the relationship.

Now, I could list a host of other positive reasons and benefits for repeated and regular worship, fellowship and Bible study, but this one, the fact that it strengthens our relationship with God, is the one I believe that really matters. People who neglect worship for worldly pleasure or pastimes, demonstrate what their priorities are. This is not a way to build up your faith. I understand that people work shifts, things happen, babies get sick, we go out of town and have to work overtime. There are plenty of reasons why you can't attend worship on a Wednesday or Sunday night, or make it for the Lord's day service. However, when our lifestyle includes regular worship, our faith can stand the pressure caused by missing regular worship at times. This is because in our lives, regular worship is the rule and not the exception.

## **DO YOU HAVE TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?**

The short answer to this is yes. Do you have to be a member of the church of Christ to be saved? Yes. Why? Three reasons.

### **1. You cannot be a Christian and be saved without being part of Christ's church.**

Simple as that. I'll make it even more simple. There are really only two places to be in existence: you're either in the kingdom of darkness, which is the world, or you're in the kingdom of Christ, which is the church (Colossians 1:13). When you are saved, Jesus Himself adds you or places

you into His body, which is the kingdom, which is the church (Acts 2:47). And the church, in this world, is an organized religious body. It's organized, of course, according to the New Testament, not according to somebody's idea, but it, nevertheless, is organized.

When I hear people say, "I'm a spiritual person, I love the Lord, but I have no use for organized religion." Really? Is that so? Well, I guess you and God don't agree on this, because He has a role for organized religion, because in the Old Testament He went to great lengths to organize Jewish worship, Jewish religion. And in the New Testament, His Son died on the cross in order to create the "organized" church of Jesus Christ, church of Christ or kingdom of light. Call it what you will. People who say they hate organized religion, are saying they hate the Lord's church, because the Lord's church is organized religion. I understand what they're saying. They hate religious groups that are there simply for money or who talk a good game, but they don't really do what they say. Sure, I understand that. But still, the very idea of being saved means to be part of the church.

Saying you don't want to be part of the church or you don't need the church, is to say that you don't need Christ. You cannot have Christ without the church. Why? Because He is the head of the body. Some people say, well, I'm faithful to the head, but I have no use for the body. Really? How do you do that metaphysically? You can't do it physically. You can't say, well, I'll just be with the head, but I don't want the body. You see, we haven't figured out how to remove the head and keep it going without the body, not yet. It's the same thing in the church. The body is Christ's body and the head is Christ. If you're faithful to the head, you're connected to the head and the body. No way around it.

## **2. You don't choose a church, because there's only one church that is pleasing and recognized by God, and that is the one formed according to His Word.**

Jesus said, "*upon this rock I will build My church,*" Matthew 16:18. Notice, He didn't say, upon this rock I will build a variety of churches to appeal to all religious flavors. He didn't say that. He just said, My church, one church. And that church belongs to Christ. You can join a religious group that calls itself a church and be part of that if you want to, but the Bible says that when you confess your faith in Christ, repent of your sins and are immersed in water in Jesus' name, He Himself adds you to His church.

Acts 2:41 says, "And on that day 3,000 souls were added to 'the church.'" Who added them to the church? Christ did. What did He add them to? His body. How? They confessed His name, repented, were baptized and subsequently added to the church. Has anything changed in two thousand years? No. We continue to add people to the body of Christ in exactly the same way. Therefore, you have to be a member of the church that Christ adds you to in order to be saved.

### **3. There are many religious groups claiming to be Christ's church, but the only church that Christ will receive when He comes will be the one that has obeyed His word and His teaching concerning what a church is or is not.**

In Matthew 7:22-24 Jesus has told us this. Many will say, Lord, Lord, on that day, and He'll say, I never knew you. What do you mean? We did miracles, we called on Your name, we had a big group. He said, no, get away from me. What did they do wrong? They didn't obey His word. You can't have any part of Me, if you don't obey My word. You don't become part of Me on your terms. You become part of Me, meaning Christ, you become part of Me on My terms. And on My terms I accept everyone, on My terms. There's no sinner who's too sinful not to be brought into Me, if he comes to Me on my terms, which are what? Believe, repent, be baptized Acts 2:38. Those are my terms.

If you love the Lord and want to be received by Him when He comes, you need to be sure that your church obeys and follows Jesus' word. All I can say to that is to compare the church of Christ to others, as far as their obedience to Christ's words in the New Testament are concerned, and see who is really following the pattern here.

The true church doesn't have a physical address, necessarily. That's not how we decide it. The true church is the one that truly follows Jesus' words. We're not saying that Churches of Christ are error free or perfect. But we do understand what the goal is. We do understand what it is that we need to do to please God. Now, are we actually doing this all the time? The scripture that comes to mind is, "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). We strive to be a faithful New Testament church and if we are faithful in this pursuit, we will love other people in the name of the Lord; we will sacrifice ourselves in the service to the Lord; we will give generously in order to move the cause ahead; we will strive

for sexual purity; we will try to be honest people; husbands will love their wives and wives will respect and submit to their husbands. We will be those people, because that is what a faithful New Testament church teaches and encourages all of its members to do.

Let's put it this way, you have to be a member of Christ's body in order to be resurrected unto glory. And the church of Christ that I know, is dedicated to following Christ's words, and being His church, His body. You get to choose what you want to do from there on. Don't be ashamed of that. You can declare that and share that with someone, without being pompous or self-righteous. Again, it is not, I think or I believe, it should always be, I believe that the Bible teaches... and then fill in the blank and let the other person judge and decide if what you have shown them is accurate.

## **SALVATION**

Here's another common question: If a person is baptized in a church other than a Restoration church (Church of Christ), and then wants to become a member of the Church of Christ, does that person have to be rebaptized? That's a good question. A person is baptized by immersion, let's say, by a Baptist preacher. And then later on starts to go to the Church of Christ, does he have to be rebaptized? An excellent question, because it refers to a very common occurrence in this area where there are so many Baptist churches as well as many congregations of the Churches of Christ.

So remember the rules, especially rule number two, keep it biblical. When it comes to baptism you have to consider two main factors:

1. It must be done according to the Bible.
2. It must be done for biblical reasons.

In order to be Christians according to Jesus' words, we must follow His words concerning all the facets of our spiritual lives, and this includes our baptism, about which Jesus and the Apostles taught quite extensively. So according to the Lord, baptism had to be done according to His Word, and for the reasons that He Himself outlined.

## **THE MANNER OF BAPTISM**

The manner of baptism is easy to understand, because the actual word for baptism is quite descriptive. I've explained before, so we're not going to spend a lot of time here. The word in the Greek (the original language of the New Testament) for baptism means to be plunged or to be immersed or to be buried in water. That's what the word means. There are other Greek words that mean to sprinkle water or to pour water and the Holy Spirit could have inspired the writers to use any one of these words, but no. Every single time baptism comes up, the word "baptizo", which means to immerse in water, is used.

So, if someone says, how does Jesus want me to be baptized? The answer is by immersion in water. Pretty simple. So if you were sprinkled with water or you had some water poured over your head, or you never had contact with water, then the manner of your baptism was incorrect and you need to be immersed in water in the name of Jesus to be biblically baptized in the name of Jesus or the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit which both mean the same thing... by the authority of.

## **THE REASONS FOR BAPTISM**

The reasons for baptism in the New Testament, believe it or not, are quite numerous. For example,

- Baptized in order to become a disciple - Matthew 28:18
- Baptism is also to obey the Lord - Mark 16:16
- Baptism in order to be born again - John 3:3
- Baptism to enter the kingdom - John 3:5
- Baptism to receive forgiveness - Acts 2:38
- Baptism to receive the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:38
- Baptism to be added to the church - Acts 2:47
- Baptism to wash away sins - Acts 22:16
- Baptism to be buried and resurrected with Christ - Romans 6:3-5
- Baptism to put on Christ - Galatians 3:26

- Baptism to have a clear conscience - I Peter 3:21
- Baptized in order to be saved - I Peter 3:21

There are more of these, but this list is a good sample. Here's the point, three points actually. First, in the Bible every reference to baptism associates it with something that means salvation in one way or another. In other words, to be born again is the same thing as to be saved. Why? Because only the saved are born again. Baptism is always related to salvation in every passage. That is good, solid Bible exposition. Every single passage where baptism is mentioned, it is always in connection with salvation. How anybody could ever say, no, you don't need to be baptized in the process of salvation, has not read these twelve passages. I only need one. Another point, baptism for any one or a combination of these reasons, is a biblical reason, and thus a right reason to be baptized. You were baptized in order to obey the Lord? You've got a right reason. You were baptized because you wanted to be born again? Good for you. You were baptized because you were appealing to God for a clear conscience? Fine. That's a good reason.

Here's the point I want to make about this, very few people know or understand every biblical reason for baptism when they are baptized, but they must do it for at least one biblical reason for it to be legitimate. I'll use myself as an example. In November 1977 I was baptized. What scripture really drew me to baptism? Mark 16:16. I didn't want to be lost. I was a sinner, and I knew it. I wanted to be saved but how would that happen? So the preacher opened the Bible and read Mark 16:16. *"Those who believe and are baptized will be saved."* The preacher studying with me said, "What does it say, Michael?" "Well, I answered, it says if you believe and are baptized you would be saved." He continued, "Does it mean anything else?" I looked at the passage again and thought about his question and answered, "No." I then said to him, "Well, alright, let's go. Where's the water?" He said, "Why?" I replied with certainty, "I want to be saved. I don't want to go to hell. I want to become a Christian. I want to obey the Lord. I've spent my life disobeying Him, now I want to obey Him."

I had no idea that night that at my baptism I would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). I didn't understand the concept that at baptism I was added to the Lord's body. I didn't know these things because I hadn't been fully taught yet. Can you imagine every time I

learned another reason or blessing as a result of baptism I would have to be re-baptized? This is why I say that if you are baptized for one legitimate biblical reason (forgiveness or to be saved etc.) then you receive all of the blessings God has attached to this initial expression of faith in Jesus Christ.

However, the opposite is true as well. Baptism for a non-biblical idea or reason invalidates your baptism. For example, being baptized because my friend was baptized is not a biblical reason for baptism. Neither is being baptized because my parents want me to; or baptized so I can marry my girlfriend; baptized because it's my birthday or because everyone else at camp is going to have it done on the last night; or being baptized as a sign that I'm already saved by some other method. All of these are not biblical reasons and therefore not valid. So as true as the first point is: if you're baptized for one right reason, you receive all the blessings that come with biblical baptism. Conversely, if you're not baptized for the right reason, then you don't receive any of the blessings.

For this reason, if you're baptized for the wrong reason, your baptism is invalid. The Bible provides an example of what to do in a case like this.

<sup>1</sup> It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were in all about twelve men.  
- Acts 19:1-7

We read in this passage of 12 men who were baptized the right way (by immersion) but for the wrong reason (they received John's baptism to prepare for the coming of the kingdom). However, this baptism was administered after Pentecost Sunday when the kingdom had fully arrived

and Peter was inviting people to enter in through the preaching of the gospel. So Paul meets with them and in his study realizes that they know nothing of the Spirit having received John's baptism instead of Jesus' baptism which carried with it the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Even though they had been baptized in the correct manner (immersion), Paul re-baptizes them but this time not only in the correct manner but also for a correct biblical reason (in their case for the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit).

So to answer the original question and to finish up this chapter, when you want to know if you need to be re-baptized, compare the reason and the manner in which you were baptized to the Bible. If you were baptized in an unbiblical way or for an unbiblical reason, then the Bible teaches that you should be rebaptized in the correct way and for one or all of the correct reasons.

Of course, as I say, the opposite is also true: if you were baptized correctly for a true biblical reason, then your baptism is Biblical and thus never to be repeated.



# 9.

## What Other Religions Teach About Salvation

Most of the questions in this study had to do with church issues. I suppose this is because people want to know things about the church itself. Which is the true church; or why do we do what we do in the church of Christ; or do we have to attend and where should we worship and how should we do so in order to please God? Those are the usual questions when we solicit questions about the Bible. There are also many questions about salvation. I think this is normal because salvation is an important issue. Remember the one we started with, "Why do people in the church of Christ think they're the only ones saved?" This question is repeatedly asked. Other related questions are: "Is baptism necessary for salvation?" or "Can you be lost once you're saved?" These are the type of questions on the minds of people who attend church regularly. They seem to think primarily about these kind of things.

The questions about church, however, are ones that are usually debated among those who call themselves Christians. Debates about the true church that, the role of baptism and today's hot topic, the role of women in the church never fail to be part of any serious religious discussion. You need to remember, however, that the closer you are to what the Bible actually teaches on these subjects, the stronger your argument.

It's not about the size of the church or the group, it's not about tradition or name recognition when it comes to these type of matters or questions, it is always about Bible accuracy. Christianity is based on the Bible. The example I give is the Roman Catholic Church, something I know about because I grew up as a Catholic, in a place where most of the people were Roman Catholic. Consider the Catholic Church for a moment. It is the largest "Christian" group in the world. It is over 1000 years old and has name recognition in every nation, however, none of these things strengthens its weak doctrinal teachings on subjects like baptism or church function and form. The way the church should be organized, its teachings on spiritual matters and how it operates as a church are settled by biblical accuracy, not size, age or how elaborate the worship services are. These things count for nothing when it comes to answering important Bible questions. The key factor should be, "What does the Bible teach?" since it is the sole arbiter of matters pertaining to Christianity, including the church. Therefore, when discussing differences with fellow believers, it is important that you use only the Bible as your base and proof for what you believe and teach.

I've said that it is normal that fellow believers often discuss and debate various issues and Bible interpretations. The real conflict, however, occurs when discussing salvation issues with people who are not Christians. I don't mean a discussion with someone who has yet to become a Christian. I mean people who are presently members of a completely different religion. I'd like to briefly discuss these different religions in order to clarify the background of those who practice other faiths, and who may engage you in a discussion concerning religion.

There are 12 major organized religions in the world. These break down into many sub groups and types but for our study's purpose we will examine the 12 core organized religions. The idea of being saved or of going to heaven or being with God, no matter how you explain that, is part of every religion. Each group has a particular teaching on how someone lives after death, or continues their existence in some way after they die.

In the study of world religions the different faiths are categorized by the geographical location of their origins. These, then, would be the order in which they appear and the way we will examine the individual faiths. Near Eastern religions, Eastern religions and Far Eastern religions.

## NEAR EASTERN RELIGIONS

### **Zoroastrianism**

A very ancient religion, nearly extinct. There are still some that practice Zoroastrianism in the world today. It is a religion that comes from Iran and has been practiced in India and Afghanistan. Their idea of salvation is that if the individual struggles against evil and wins, they go into the place called heaven. Therefore, their concept of salvation: a winning struggle against evil in one's life.

### **Judaism**

We know that Judaism began in Israel and has spread all over the world. These people were chosen by God, and thus by virtue of the fact that you belong to this nation, you are saved. The idea is that if you are a faithful Jew and part of the nation, you are then subject to the reward. There are different groups within Judaism who have different ideas. Some don't believe that there is any afterlife and some do. However, the idea about salvation is always the same from group to group: you have to be part of the nation in order to have salvation.

### **Christianity**

Christianity is considered a Near Eastern religion because it started in Israel and has spread all over the world. In Christianity, salvation is a gift from God based on faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and belief that His vicarious death on the cross pays mankind's moral debt for sin. The saved experience conscious eternal life with God in heaven after they are resurrected at the end of the world.

## EASTERN RELIGIONS

### **Islam**

Islam began in the city of Mecca in what is known today as Saudi Arabia and has since spread throughout the world. Islam teaches that salvation is accomplished by practicing and repeating the Five Pillars. The Five Pillars of Islam are: fasting, pilgrimage, giving alms, prayer (five times a day), and confessing that Muhammad is the true Prophet. A continual

practice of these things is what saves you. An interesting point concerning this religion is that one is never really sure about their salvation. Muslims can do all the right things and still not be saved because Allah considers that you are deficient in some way or another that only he knows. With Islam, the only sure way to be in paradise is by death through jihad (dying in the defense of the faith).

## **Hinduism**

In the practice of Hinduism, the idea of salvation or the way to salvation is by eliminating evil in your life until you are pure enough to merge with Brahma. In Hinduism, Deity does not have an individual personality, it is a force. Hindus continue in this effort at self-improvement through a series of reincarnated lives until they reach the final stage of merging with Brahma. The prohibition against killing cows for food stems from the belief that cows are the final reincarnated form one attains before merging with Brahma.

## **Sikhism**

Sikhism is an amalgamation of several of these Indian religions, so they have similar features. In Sikhism, repeating God's name and the love of mankind will bring you to the same objective as the Hindu religion. The main differences between Hinduism and Sikhism are social and political rather than spiritual. In Hinduism the caste system locks you into the social status in which you are born. These stations are separated by wealth and position and no social movement is permitted. Sikhism was an effort to maintain some of the ideas of Hinduism but eliminate the caste system. Sikhs place a great moral value on the brotherhood and equality of man.

## **FAR EASTERN RELIGIONS**

### **Confucianism**

Confucianism comes from China and is not strictly a religion, however, is considered so for study purposes. It is a social system that promotes social conformity and harmony. Confucianism believes that virtuous living fostered by conformity and harmony will give you heaven on earth. When people conform to the right way of living they will create a society

that works well - a social paradise. There is no formal worship of a Deity or belief in the afterlife.

## **Shinto**

The religion of Japan, believes that the country itself fell from the heavens, and the Emperor is a god and the people are children of the gods. In the Shinto religion, Japanese supremacy and maintaining it, was heaven on earth. In the Shinto shrines a form of ancestor worship is practiced since their idea of heaven is to live on through their descendants.

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism originally comes from India. In Buddhism, the idea of salvation is that the elimination of desire leads to eternal bliss. The final state is unconsciousness as one is absorbed into the greater Being. This is accomplished through meditation, religious practice or asceticism. The goal is to discipline the body to the point where it no longer experiences desire since it is desire that is the root of all pain and suffering.

## **Taoism**

Taoism originates from China and also Japan. Taoism or Daoism is a type of belief, or **a way of thinking about life**. It is at least 2,500 years old and said to be a philosophy. ... Instead of spending a lot of time trying to explain what the Tao is, Taoists focus on living a simple and balanced life in harmony with nature. It is a religion that strives for balance in life. One of the main ideas of Taoism is the **belief in balancing forces, or yin and yang**. These ideas represent matching pairs, such as light and dark, hot and cold, action and inaction, which work together toward a universal whole which is the main goal of this practice. Taoists have no deity or worship rituals. The main activity is the effort to be in harmony with the Tao and thus live a balanced life.

## **NON-ORGANIZED RELIGIONS**

### **Paganism**

Paganism is religion. It is worldwide. There are forms of paganism everywhere including all forms of voodoo or witchcraft, magic and nature

worship. Nature worship is the type of religion practiced by Native Americans here in the United States and in other places where the subject of the worship is the land, air, trees and other elements of nature including the stars.

The main idea in paganism is that man manipulates the spirits or the unseen forces in nature with various incantations and rituals in order to create an ideal place here on earth. There is also the manipulation of the spirits to advantage oneself or bring harm to enemies.

## **Atheism**

Atheists believe that mankind is the highest form of life, and there is no God, heaven or salvation beyond the material world. The goal is to make the short existence one has here as pleasant as possible using whatever philosophy or system that achieves this optimum state.

These are the major beliefs of the world and in history, concerning salvation. And again, I have to repeat, we've not done the topic justice. Please note some important points about these various beliefs when you compare them.

First of all, they all have some form or idea of salvation. Every group aspires to a better life somehow, either a better life here through the practice of their religion or belief, or a better life in another world after this life is over. Every belief system has this idea of salvation whether it is a way of having the best life possible here on earth or aspiring to another existence after death. Second, and this is an important point, every one of these religions/belief systems, except Christianity, is a works or law-based system for achieving salvation, heaven or the good life here in this world. All of them are work-based concepts. For example:

- Zoroastrianism - the person has to win the struggle over evil.
- Judaism - You must obey the Jewish law and customs.
- Islam - Muslims must practice the five pillars successfully.
- Hinduism - The individual must purify himself from evil in life, after life, after life.

- Sikhism - Proper worship and conduct must be performed in order to be worthy to be saved.
- Confucianism - Heaven on earth is possible, but only through personal conformity to the rules of society.
- Shintoism - Must maintain Japanese supremacy at all costs.
- Buddhism - Must renounce self in order to reach Nirvana.
- Taoism - Must maintain Yin/Yang balance otherwise, no harmony.
- Paganism - Must appease the gods and spirits in order to be rewarded.
- Atheism, compliance to a system or a philosophy. You must be in compliance to be happy; or practice total non-compliance, in order to be free. So, you're either going to be an anarchist - break all the rules, or keep all the rules, but you've got to deal with the rules either way.

Note that in every single one of these religions, the burden is on the human being to do something, achieve something or comply with someone or something, in order to earn or find heaven, nirvana, salvation, happiness, moksha or oneness with Brahma. You name it, whatever salvation is called, you've got to do something in order to be worthy of it.

Christianity is the only religion where the offer and the burden for accomplishing salvation rests solely with God, and man can do nothing on his own to deserve or to accomplish his own salvation.

Salvation from a Christian perspective is possible and available to all.

- Christianity is not culturally or geographically based, like a many of these other religions - i.e. Judaism.
- Christianity offers a tangible, conscious, personal experience of salvation and heaven, which others don't.
- Christianity promises life eternal after death. In Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism and Atheism, there is no life after death.

- Christianity is a salvation offered because of love and received because of faith. Zoroastrianism and Islam, these are both works-based religions.
- Christianity is filled with hope for the future. Paganism, especially, is based on fear and the mystery of the unknown.

Therefore, when you compare religions, you learn of many practices and fascinating histories, as well as great leaders and deep spiritual ideas, but the bottom line is always what they teach about the salvation of the soul or what they teach about heaven or the improvement of the spiritual person. This is what religion is all about in the end: reconciling human beings with the One who is greater than they are. This is the essence of religious practice.

So, in the debate over this issue among the 13 major religions or systems in the world, Christianity's teaching is universally accessible and timeless, not to mention unique among the 13. In all the other religions, man has to reach and pull himself up to God. Christianity is the only religion where God reaches down and brings man up to Himself.

I ask you, which religion do you want to practice? If you had no religion and you were offered the choice, which way would you want to go? Would you want to climb up to heaven using your own resources, or would you prefer that God simply brought you up to Himself by His own power? Christianity is the most desirable religion because it is unlimited and offers eternal life with power, with happiness, with consciousness, with knowledge of God and knowledge of self.

People often ask, "Will I know who I am in heaven?" Absolutely! How could you be happy if you didn't know who you were? If you suddenly arrived in heaven, but you didn't know who you were, or had no consciousness of who you had been, how could you experience happiness? You have to know who you are. You have to be able to know that you're in heaven. You will know that everything that you read in the scriptures was true because now you are here. Therefore, you have to be conscious in order to experience happiness in heaven. "Will we know each other?" Absolutely, we'll know each other in heaven. Why wouldn't we? If I'm me and you're you, why wouldn't I know you? Some also ask, "What will we talk about?" In my opinion, I believe that we won't be

interested in talking to each other because we will be too involved in knowing and worshipping our Lord.

A more unhappy thought is, "Will we think about the people who didn't make it?" I don't believe we will because in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) it says that there is a gulf between those in heaven and those in hell so that there can be no communication or crossing over from one dimension to another. I believe that this is Jesus' way of telling us that we can no longer communicate literally, emotionally or historically with those who we once knew but are not with us in heaven. This buffer to maintain our peace of mind and happiness is given to us by God to erase the knowledge of sin, sinners and unbelievers we once knew. We will have a spiritual body and I personally believe that we will be so absorbed in knowing God that this experience will eclipse everything else. No other religion offers this experience of heaven or has historical documentation of God's appearances, miracles and words to confirm these promises.

In conclusion, when it comes to a discussion concerning salvation with those of other religions, we have the most compelling and powerful argument for the salvation offered through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when talking about religion with someone of another faith, the best place to make your case is the superiority of Christian salvation taught in the Bible. Let's be realistic, you are never going to debate with a Muslim believer about baptism since this rite has no interest for him. However, a Muslim or a Hindu or Buddhist cares about salvation or what happens after death. This similar interest can be the common point of discussion in which the Christian religion has the strongest argument and evidence of a superior experience and manner of receiving this most precious and universally desired blessing.



# 10.

## Church Organization

In the previous chapter we reviewed the major religions in the world and examined their beliefs and teachings concerning salvation, heaven, paradise, or the hereafter. One of the points made was that every religion has some teaching concerning the afterlife. Most people who seek out religion are usually interested in what it offers them concerning salvation. Here are some important points when comparing this area of belief among the major organized religions and philosophies of the world.

1. Eleven of the twelve religious systems rely on law-based or works-oriented methods of achieving salvation, paradise or final peace.
2. Christianity is the only religion where the burden for man's salvation rests with God, and is offered freely on a basis of faith.
3. When compared, the nature of salvation in the Christian religion is far superior in value and experience than any of the other faiths.

## MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS

We've discussed many questions about church life and salvation. In this chapter, I'd like to describe certain questions that cover a wider range of topics.

### What is meant by congregational autonomy?

I believe that part of this question has to do with why the Churches of Christ don't have a headquarters or regional supervisors. Many churches are organized based on various worldly models. For example,

- **Roman Catholic** churches follow the empirical Roman model of government. There is a supreme leader, the Pope, just like in the Roman Empire there was a supreme leader, the Emperor. There is a college of advisers in the Catholic church, called Cardinals. The Roman Empire had the Senate and its senators. There were regional leaders (governors) in the Roman system just as there are regional leaders in Roman Catholicism called Archbishops. They oversee various territories, which are each led by lesser ranking clerics that are called bishops, who are responsible for several churches or the churches in one particular city. And then, like the Roman Centurion (who was responsible for 100 soldiers) the Catholic Church has the local parish priest who ministers to a single local congregation.
- **Protestants** did away with the papal head. In other words, they eliminated the idea of the Pope in their church organization, but maintained the same top-down ranking system. They simply gave different names to the positions and invested more power in the regional groups of leaders, who served as a type of religious court. These Synods or other ruling bodies were responsible for governing the churches under their purview.
- **Evangelicals** have a modified system based more on the American political system than the old European classical or ecclesiastic model. They have conventions with regional groups that vie for votes and influence pushing various agendas and candidates to sit on "boards" or "councils."

- **Sectarian groups** (Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists etc.) have a more patriarchal approach, where a relative or hand-picked successor to the original founder wields great influence and power. These leaders have veto power over the various church and regional leaders and agendas.

In a previous chapter I explained that what made the Church of Christ different from all other Christian groups or churches was twofold:

1. We believe that the entire Bible is inspired and therefore our authoritative guide in spiritual, moral and organizational matters.
2. We also believe that the Bible teaches that we should consciously try to establish and operate the church according to the commands and the guidelines given to us in the New Testament.

Historically, the effort to use only the New Testament in the establishment and function of the church has been referred to as Restorationism. This effort tries to duplicate the first century model of the church in the 21st century. Therefore, when asked how to go about organizing the church on a local or an international level, we consult the New Testament to see what instructions Jesus and the Apostles have left us about this topic.

When we review the New Testament about church organization, we find many teachings and examples concerning the make up and normal function of the local church as well as inspired teaching concerning ministry, the qualification of leaders and other information to help the church grow spiritually as well as numerically. According to the New Testament, therefore, a Christian church was made up of the following groups:

- Baptized Believers in Jesus Christ - Acts 2:47
- There are several roles or offices of leadership in this organization - Ephesians 4:11; I Timothy 3; Acts 20

- Apostles were the messengers of Christ, specifically the 12 in the upper room at Pentecost, and Paul the Apostle, later called to preach to the Gentiles.
- Prophets were those who spoke the word directly given to them by God.
- Elders / pastors / bishops / overseers / shepherds / presbyters are different terms that refer to the same person: an older or experienced Christian man, who is a spiritual leader and mentor in the congregation, and who serves primarily as a teacher.
- Evangelists / preachers / ministers are different terms referring to one who ministers the Word of God to the church and proclaims the gospel to the lost. Evangelists are responsible for planting new churches as well as organizing the church along the pattern given in the New Testament.
- Deacons are men who minister to the various needs of church members.
- Teachers are those qualified and trained to teach the Word.
- Saints are baptized believers. Every member of Christ's body is a saint, however, some saints, because of their skills, gifts, training, or experience are appointed to serve in some particular role or other. All the saints serve Christ in one way or another, but some of those saints are given special responsibilities within the congregation.

Once the New Testament was completed (this involved writing, circulation, compilation, authentication of inspired material) the present 27 books were officially recognized as the inspired canon (Council of Hippo - 393BC) the work of the Apostles and prophets was completed. From this time forward, the New Testament itself became the sole inspired guide for the Christian church.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training, for righteousness.

- I Timothy 3:16

Any other roles or offices in the church other than the ones mentioned above are merely inventions of human beings because they do not have the authority of the New Testament for their establishment. Therefore, if a New Testament church in the first century did not have a Pope, a New Testament church in the 21st century should not have one either since the New Testament does not authorize this position in the Christian church.

Another feature that is quite remarkable when studying this question is what you do not see in the New Testament concerning church organization. You do not see any of the modern systems of church hierarchy that exist in these other groups that I mentioned before. In the New Testament church, each congregation was autonomous and led by its own local leaders. Yes, different churches asked for advice and received help from the Apostles in the first century (Acts 15) but this was because they did not yet possess the entire New Testament record. The Apostles were the source of scriptural authority at that time but today we have their record contained in the New Testament.

We also notice that every mention of congregational leadership in the Bible (Acts 20; Philippians 1:1) always referred to a group of elders or bishops or overseers. There were always more than one. In other words, the New Testament church had a plurality of elders in each congregation. Unlike today in most Protestant or Evangelical churches, there was no reference to only one who was the pastor of a single congregation, it was always a group of pastors, elders, or bishops and overseers.

When we put the pieces together concerning congregational organization, this is the picture that emerges from the New Testament.

- Churches met mainly in homes or in a cluster of homes in each city, and sometimes they used public places when these were available (Acts 19:9; Romans).
- Each congregation had a number of leaders depending on the size and the maturity of their congregation. These leaders

included elders, teachers and deacons, who had specific responsibilities for different areas of church life.

- As the Apostles died off, the recorded word replaced the need for prophets, and there were more evangelists. With time as these congregations grew, the preachers remained longer with individual congregations and served as missionaries to other nations.
- These autonomous or congregational style remained in place until it was replaced by the Catholic model in the second, third and fourth centuries.

If we want to practice New Testament Christianity, we need to renew the model of autonomous congregations with local leaders all held together by a common belief and commitment to follow God's pattern in the New Testament for church structure and organization.

Churches of Christ have over 25,000 congregations in the world with no headquarters, no leadership with authority beyond the local congregation, united only by our commitment to restore the practice of New Testament Christianity ...and it works! Why?

- Because the New Testament says that it does.
- Because if you are committed to this Biblical principle, you will have unity and fellowship regardless of the culture or time.



# 11.

## Garden of Eden and Noah's Flood Questions

These last questions don't fit into any one category, so we're just going to group them together as Old Testament questions or New Testament questions.

### OLD TESTAMENT QUESTIONS

#### WHY DID GOD FORBID EATING FROM THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL?

Why did He do that? What was the point? Why didn't He just put them in the garden and just leave them there? I mean, everything is fine, everything is beautiful. He saw what He had created and He said, this is very good. Why add the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Why that commandment?

The answer is in Genesis:

<sup>16</sup> The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup> but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

- Genesis 2:16-17

Notice first of all, there's no mention of an apple here. It just mentions a fruit. Some of the reasons why God did this: first of all, the commandment established the context for the exercise of free will. We talked about this before, you cannot be human or made in the image of God unless you have free will. Otherwise, if you don't have free will, you're a robot, a plant, a rock, an animal, but you're not a human being made in the image of God. Why? Because God has free will.

Therefore, God gave the command in order to kick-start, if you wish, man's gift of free will. Humans have been created in such a way that they can discern good and evil and make moral choices. And so, the command not to eat of the fruit provided the framework or the law against which this ability of man could be exercised. In other words, you can't choose right from wrong if there's no choice to be made. If everything is right, you're not exercising your freewill. And if you're not exercising your freewill, you are not fully human.

Another reason that God gave the command was to establish the order in creation. By establishing or giving the law, God was establishing His rulership over man. Why? Because the one who's in charge makes the rules. We know this. In a family, is it the children who make the rules? Woe to the parents and the household where it is the children who make the rules. No, it's the parents that make the rules. So, by establishing or giving the law or rule, God was establishing His rulership over man. Man would always know that God was superior, because God was the One who made the rules.

Third, there may be more, I'll give you three. This rule was established to show every generation of mankind after Adam that moral authority comes from God. He is the source of moral authority. I go back to my family analogy here. Sometimes you're telling children, well, I don't want you to hang out with this certain person. "But why?" they ask. "Well," you

say, "I don't like the look of him, the way he talks to his parents, other reasons, I'm not sure." You're giving your child some of the reasons for that particular prohibition and they keep coming back with, "But why? But why?"

Tired of the jousting you finally say, "Because I said so." Of course, you want to have some dialogue with your children, you want to give them reasons why you do things, but if they keep coming back with the why, it's no longer curiosity, it's a challenge. And in the end you say, well, because I say so. What's behind that phrase, because I say so? What you are conveying is the reality of your present relationship, the parent is in charge. I'm the parent. I make the rules. You obey the rules. In the same way, God makes the rules and we must obey the rules. His rules, however, were first and continue to be primary. With time, humans would create laws and rules, but these would always be secondary to God's laws.

Isn't that the big debate we're having in our society today? What has made America great? Many believe that what has made America great is its Constitution and the laws and social norms built upon it. When we review the Constitution and how it was created we realize that many of its ideas are based on laws and principles given to us by God. I hear Christians or believing politicians say that the rights that we have here in the United States are given to us by God, not the government. The government didn't give us the right to freedom. That's a right given to us by God. Try going to Russia and publicly declaring that the peoples' right to freedom has been given to them by God. Try doing that in China or Pakistan and see how those governments will respond to your public declaration. What makes America great at its source is that its ideology, government, and laws have all been based in one way or another on God's law. Exercising our free will, then, is what animates us and reveals the negative or positive consequences of our choices.

## WHY DOESN'T THE BIBLE MENTION DINOSAURS?

The Bible doesn't use the word dinosaurs, but it does mention them, however, not with the words coined in modern science using Latin or Greek word sources instead, which were not available at the time Genesis was written. When the book of Genesis was written, Hebrew was the language. There was no Greek. The modern English word dinosaur comes

from Greek words *Deinos*, which means 'terrible', and *sauros*, which means 'lizard.'

In Genesis 1:21, the Bible refers to God creating great whales or great sea monsters. The Hebrew word used here is the word *tannin*, which is also translated elsewhere in the Old Testament as dragons. Isaiah the prophet talks about Leviathan, the dragon of the sea (Isaiah 27:1).

The Bible refers to animals in groups and uses the word *tannin* to refer to various animals in one group. What animals fit into the group that the Bible refers to as *tannin*? Well, serpents, great lizards, monsters, sea monsters. Dinosaurs, therefore, would have fallen into this category, as one of God's creatures, which like many others of that time, are now extinct. Animals becoming extinct has been going on for thousands of years, and it continues to do so.

In answer to the question, "Do I believe in climate change?" Absolutely, I believe in climate change. The climate started to change drastically after the great flood, and will continue to change until the end of the world when God will destroy the earth and the heavens, and the new heavens and earth will be established (II Peter 3:10-14; Revelation 21:1;4).

## WHERE DID CAIN AND ABEL GET THEIR WIVES? WAS THIS INCEST?

First of all, the Bible only mentions Cain having a wife and he had children who intermarried within their own families. This was part of God's plan before the great flood to populate the earth. At that time this type of intermarriage was not considered immoral, and not dangerous genetically. After the flood when mankind was significantly weakened and subject to greater vulnerability to disease, family intermarriage (incest) was slowly discontinued until it was strictly forbidden by the time God gave the Law to Moses (Leviticus 18:7-18)

## IS THERE LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS?

I heard on the news that the government spent \$220 million dollars on a search for UFOs. Some people say, "Well, how come you don't believe in extra-terrestrials? There are billions of stars and billions of planets, surely there must be another planet where there is intelligent life?" My response is that I don't believe in extraterrestrials because of Genesis

3:20. It says, "He called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living." That would be all the living created in the image of God which constitutes all intelligent life since there is no intelligent life unless it has been created by God. This passage states that Eve is the source of all the intelligent life born.

Remember, I said that the Bible teaches that the world was populated from these original two people and it was then repopulated after the great flood with only eight people - Noah and his family.

Cain then married one of his many siblings, because this is how the world began to be populated. Before the flood people lived for centuries. If you read the genealogies of the early patriarchs you find that many lived beyond five hundred years, some even to 900 years (i.e. Methuselah 969 years). People who lived this long were able to have a great number of children who multiplied in ever-widening circles, as people moved further away from their original families.

It was not considered incest when someone married within their family because God commanded them to multiply and populate the earth. It became incest only after the flood, when man's human nature was weakened by centuries of sinfulness, and closed marriages began to be a risk to society and to one's health.

By the time of Moses, the law against intermarrying was finally established and codified, and we read about that in Leviticus 18:9 but until that time we read about Bible characters marrying their cousins or their step-sisters, and there was no immorality attached to that. Eventually, however, these unions were forbidden by God in His laws.

## HOW DO YOU ANSWER THOSE WHO SAY THAT BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T EXPERIENCE DEATH, ENOCH AND ELIJAH ARE THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD AND NOT JESUS?

Enoch, who appears in Genesis 5:24, and Elijah the Prophet, who appears in the Old Testament but also referred to in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews, did not see death. In other words, they didn't die of natural means and were subsequently buried. Aaron died and was buried. Moses died and was buried. Joseph died and was buried, but these two have no mention of their death. Some say that because of this they are the

firstborn from the dead, and not Jesus, since they did not die and were taken up to heaven.

How to answer this question? You start from the Bible.

<sup>21</sup> Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup> Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup> So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. <sup>24</sup> Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.  
- Genesis 5:21-24

The Bible says that he was not here anymore. God took him to heaven. He didn't experience physical death. Let's read another passage.

By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.  
- Hebrews 11:5

The Hebrew writer clarifies and explains what is written about Enoch back in Genesis.

As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.  
- II Kings 2:11

This means that Elisha did not experience death. While he was still alive on earth, he was taken up to heaven.

These are the records of how these men were spared the agony of physical death and were brought directly to God. Some people say, since they did not die and went straight to heaven, they are the firstborn and should be the "firstborn" that the Bible mentions and not Jesus. Let's examine what Paul teaches about this point in Colossians. In this passage Paul refers to Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

- Colossians 1:15-18

In Colossians, Paul uses the term firstborn, not to say that Jesus was the first one ever to be created or the first one ever to be resurrected from the dead. This would be in contradiction to the Bible. As far as we know, angels were the first beings that were created. Angels were created before men. Satan's fall took place before man was created. Angels, therefore, were the first creatures or beings that were created. We know that Satan was displaced because he did not remain in the position that God had originally given him. Therefore, God cast him down to earth (my own theory, and it's just my own theory, is that Satan, originally a beautiful angel, refused to minister to men as angels were assigned to do and this was the cause of his and other angels' rebellion).

Paul uses the term firstborn to refer to Jesus' rank or His position in creation and in the church. Mankind was created not born. Paul says Jesus was the "firstborn" not the first created. Jesus' divine nature gives Him the first position, the first rank in creation because of His power, perfection and of course, because of His divinity. He has the first rank even if He wasn't the first one to go from earth to heaven like Enoch or Elijah. However, unlike these two men, Jesus as the "firstborn" went from heaven to earth and then back to heaven, something no one but Him has ever done thus confirming His title and power as "firstborn."

Note also that the passages about Enoch and Elijah only say that they were taken up without seeing death, not that they themselves were glorified. Jesus is the first among those who are resurrected unto glory. All others, including these two, will follow Him into glory and eternal life.

## WHY AREN'T THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS INCLUDED IN THE CANON OF THE BIBLE. HOW DID THEY KNOW WHICH BOOKS TO PUT IN THE BIBLE?

There were many books circulating in the first century. Many of these were about Jesus, so how did we select the 27 books that now make up the official New Testament record? Also, what about the books sometimes included with the New Testament canon referred to as the apocryphal books. The Greek word Apocrypha means 'hidden'. This term refers to a number of books written during the Old Testament period, but because of uncertain authorship or accuracy were not considered inspired works. They were, nevertheless, valuable for study purposes because they provided historical and cultural information about biblical times and people.

There were many such books produced and circulated, but in the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church collected twelve of these apocryphal books and included them in the Catholic edition of the Bible. These twelve books had names like First and Second Esdras, or the book of Tobit, the Epistle of Jeremiah or the four books of the Maccabees. The Maccabean period was a time of uprising in Judea. Between the times of Malachi and John the Baptist there were 400 years when no inspired works were produced. We refer to this era as the inter-testamentary time period. During this time there was a revolt among the Jews against the Greeks (the world power at the time) and other surrounding nations. These books describe the politics, social customs, religion and wars taking place during that time. They are fascinating because they describe the lifestyle and issues that were happening during that period in history. There was a hunger by the people for a word from God and since no prophet appeared the vacuum was filled by writers of the times who speculated and predicted about the end times and the coming of the Messiah.

When compared to the New Testament books it is easy to see their inaccuracies and failings but, as I mentioned before, they did provide a look into the lives of the Jewish nation during the inter-testamentary historical period. Some of the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church are based on information that comes from this material.

For books to be considered part of the biblical Canon (means - a measure) or official inspired texts they had to fulfill certain criterion:

1. They had to be written by a chosen servant of God: Moses, David, Solomon; or a prophet: Samuel, Isaiah; or in the New Testament, an apostle: Peter, Paul; or the disciple of an apostle: a person like Luke, for example, who was a disciple of Paul; or Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark (who was Peter's secretary). The first criteria, therefore, was that the book (letter) had to be written by a chosen servant of God.
2. It had to be recognized as inspired when originally circulated or spoken. The book of Matthew, for example, was immediately recognized as inspired writing because Matthew was an apostle of Jesus. He had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to remember all of Jesus' teachings (John 14:26). Jesus had promised to give him understanding and remembrance of everything that He taught for the very purpose of putting it in his record.
3. The books that became inspired were books that were already considered inspired and well circulated among the apostolic church in the first century. The church already considered the writing to be inspired of God. It was simply a matter of formality to add that book to the list of official texts.
4. It also had to withstand close scrutiny. Church leaders and the scholars of the day studied and examined these books. They were looking for errors in doctrine or inconsistencies that would demonstrate that they were not truly inspired. In addition to internal scrutiny, the Bible has had to withstand the criticism of unbelieving scholars over the centuries but none of these have been able to disprove what the Bible teaches or point out errors or inconsistencies that would belie the Bible's inspired nature.
5. The book itself had to speak with divine authority and sincerity. The writers spoke with the authority of one who spoke on God's behalf. The Bible assumes that the reader accepts that it is God's inspired word without doubt or hesitancy.

The Old Testament Canon or list of inspired books was collected and set by the first century, probably after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It was an effort by the Jews at the time to preserve their written history. Therefore, when we read the Old Testament, we are reading what Jesus

and the Apostles were reading in the first century. However, the Jews divided the 39 books of the Old Testament differently compressing the material into 22 books.

The New Testament Canon or list was collected and finally set at the Council of Hippo in 393 AD, and the two sets of books were assembled into the Bible as we know it today in 400 AD by Jerome who produced the first translation of the Bible from the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) into Latin.

## IS THE LIVING BIBLE A GOOD TRANSLATION?

The original manuscripts for the Bible were in Hebrew, Greek, and parts of it in Aramaic, which was a common language in first century Israel. At first, the translation from these original texts and languages were made into Latin and then into other languages, so more people could read the Bible for themselves. It is important to note, however, that each new translation was based on the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, copies of which were plentiful and continue to be preserved in various museums around the world (mainly the British Museum).

When my wife Lise and I first became Christians we were new at reading the Bible. That was not something we did growing up. We used to test to make sure that our Bibles said the same thing. Since we were both bilingual (we each spoke and read both in English and French), we would test the accuracy of the Bible in the following way. She would read a certain passage in her French Bible and I would read the same in my English Bible. We would then compare what was written to see if there were any discrepancies from one language to another. We soon learned that what was written in my English version was exactly the same in meaning and context in her French Bible. Of course, the reason for this accuracy was the fact that both translations were based on exactly the same source material, the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible.

Versions are Bibles in the same language, but ones that have a different style of language. For example, you have the King James Version Bible. It uses what we refer to as Elizabethan English (i.e. Thee and Thou etc.) as its style. The reason for this is that it was translated in 1611 and that was the style of the English language used at the time.

A modern English Bible like the New American Standard Bible, for example, is the Bible that I use. It's a solid translation, accurate to the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The New International Version is known as an easy reading Bible where the translators strive to make the English as literate and easy to understand as possible. This feature makes it a good reading Bible but not necessarily one used for serious word study. Then you have the Living Bible which uses conversational English. It's called a paraphrase Bible because instead of translating the language, the translators converted the biblical ideas into their own words. This approach often misses the original intent of the authors in the selection of words and phrases which are not always easy to translate smoothly into another language. The reason I use the New American Standard Bible is because it has a proper balance. It is a relatively easy to read Bible, but it is also a good study Bible because it follows carefully the original version.

Most versions are designed around how the text is to be used: will it be used as a serious word study; is it for first-time readers; is it for someone who's going to be using it in order to preach? Most of these versions are exactly the same in meaning, only the style of language is changed.

However, one word of caution. You need to be careful with versions that leave out certain books of the Bible or change the original intent and meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew. For example, versions that change God's name to Mother God, or eliminate male reference where the man is dominant. Others change references to kings or slaves or killing, so that the version will be politically correct for one group or another. Another example, versions that eliminate the teaching that homosexuality is a sin, so as to not offend readers who happen to be Gay. There are versions that change any passage that supports male spiritual leadership in the church, so it'll be more acceptable for those who promote women's leadership roles in the church. Again, there should be no agenda in a version, other than making it clear to understand. Remember, the original texts tell us not to change, add or subtract anything from God's Word.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;  
- Revelation 22:18

A version, therefore, is not accurate or authoritative if it presents different versions of God's teachings or commands. You can have different styles of language, but not different teachings or commands.



# 12.

## **How can God die if Jesus is God?**

AND OTHER QUESTIONS.

In the previous chapter I wrote that the remaining questions in our study didn't fit into any particular category, so I divided them up into two sections, those that could be answered from the Old Testament and those that could be answered from the New Testament. I've answered questions from the Old Testament, so to finish up I'd like to end with questions that can be answered from the New Testament. Five questions, and four of them have to do with Jesus's death and resurrection.

## WHAT IS LENT, AND DOES IT APPLY TO US?

The term Lent refers to a Roman Catholic practice. The word comes from the old English word *lencten*, which refers to the springtime of year. Roman Catholics observe Lent which is actually a period of fasting, penitence and other types of ascetic practices for a prescribed number of days (40) which begin on Ash Wednesday each year and end on Palm Sunday according to the Catholic liturgical calendar.

Much of the practice of Catholicism revolves around its calendar of feasts and observances. For example, Lent represents the time that Jesus spent 40 days praying and fasting in the wilderness, and so, the Lenten observance lasts 40 days from one observance (Ash Wednesday) to another (Palm Sunday).

Catholics celebrate Palm Sunday, which is a memorial of Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We read in Luke 12, that people were praising Him, they laid garments on the ground along with palm leaves on which the donkey He was riding would pass. On Palm Sunday, Catholic churches give palm leaves to those who come to Mass. These palm leaves are kept, burned and the ashes are then used the following year on Ash Wednesday.

On Ash Wednesday the people attending Mass come forward and the priest dips his thumb into the ashes and draws a cross on the forehead of the individual. This is a reference to the ashes and sackcloth that the Jews used to wear when in mourning or penance. Lent is a modern-day observance where Catholics commemorate Jesus' fasting in the wilderness by receiving the ashes on their forehead and denying themselves certain foods or practices for 40 days.

Of course, there are no commands, examples or inferences in the Bible that lead believers to practice such things. These are strictly inventions of religious leaders without any authority from the scriptures.

## **NEW TESTAMENT RITUALS**

There are only two rituals or observances in the New Testament that we are specifically told to keep.

# 1. Baptism

Some people don't like describing baptism as a ritual because they think the term "ritual" takes away its significance, however, it is a ritual in that it is something we do that has a spiritual meaning. Biblical baptism is immersion in water (the word baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means to plunge or immerse). A repentant believer in Jesus is buried with Christ in baptism (and thus washes away his sins - Acts 22:19) and resurrects from the water (as Christ resurrected from the grave) in order to live a new life as a Christian saint. This ritual is rich in significance and power. Baptism acts out in a physical way the true, spiritual effect that is happening at that moment. A person is burying the old guilty sinner and resurrecting a new forgiven saint.

In addition to this, it is at the moment of baptism that God gives the following gifts, positions and powers. At baptism, a person:

- becomes a disciple of Jesus – Matthew 28:18-20
- obeys the gospel – Mark 16:15-16
- is born again – John 3:5
- has sins forgiven and receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:38
- Is added to the church – Acts 2:47
- puts on Christ – Galatians 3:26
- receives a clear conscience – 1 Peter 3:21
- Is considered saved – 1 Peter 3:21

All these things actually happen at baptism because God has ordained and commanded it in His word. So baptism is a ritual, or an acting out, but it is not one that has been invented by mankind. This is the important difference. The empowerment, importance or necessity of baptism is something that we are obliged to submit to because it has been established by God's word, not tradition or the idea of some religious group.

## 2. The Lord's Supper

The other ritual that Christians practice is communion. This is the only other ritual given in the New Testament that disciples are obliged to observe. Jesus Himself commanded that believers be baptized, and Jesus commanded that believers observe the Lord's supper. These are not suggestions, they are commands:

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me."

- Luke 22:19

The "Do", in "...do this," is an imperative verb. We know that it is a command because of the grammar used to instruct us on this point. In Acts 2:42 we see the apostles and the early disciples following Jesus' command. 3000 were baptized after hearing Peter's sermon on Pentecost Sunday. Luke writes that these new Christians were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread (another way of describing communion) and prayer. Then in another passage Acts 20:7 Luke writes:

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...

What is Luke teaching here? He's saying that early in the first century, Christians would gather together on the Lord's Day to break bread or to take the communion. We see, therefore, that the early disciples (being taught and led by the apostles) followed through on Jesus's command to share the communion every Lord's Day (Sunday) in remembrance of Him.

Now, there were other cultural practices that the New Testament mentions, things like foot washing, or the wearing of veils, or having a love feast, but these were not commanded for future generations of Christians like baptism and communion. When Paul talks about the wearing of veils in I Corinthians, for example, he's commenting on that practice because there was a problem in the church about continuing this tradition. Some women wanted to do away with the wearing of veils (which signified that this woman was in subjection to her father or husband). Women who became Christians felt that their freedom in Christ

also freed them of all social conventions, especially those which were a burden. However, in doing so they were getting ahead of social norms too quickly (in that culture, a woman without a veil in public was seen as immoral. The net result of doing away with this cultural symbol before its time, therefore, was to create scandal and confusion.

Paul teaches that the true meaning of modesty is not being too far ahead or behind social conventions so as to draw attention to oneself in how we dress or act. He wasn't making a new rule about the wearing of veils but rather teaching the church concerning the way it dealt with social customs without creating a negative opinion about people of faith. We know that the wearing of veils and its meaning eventually changed and the church's customs about these things changed with the times. The church could do this because this matter was guided by human opinion and custom and not instructions or commands from the Bible.

Communion, however, was a different matter. This ritual was given by Christ and taught by the Apostles. This is why Paul begins his teaching on the subject with the words, *"This is what I received from the Lord..."* I Corinthians 11:23-26. In this instance he is teaching the church how to observe that command (taking communion) in a proper way and to maintain this teaching in the future. Other practices like prayer beads, candles, parades, feasts, these are all things that were designed and implemented by the authority of religious leaders and teachers in various groups. They may have had a sincere goal of enhancing worship, however, whatever the motivation, they did not have the Biblical authority to do so. We have the information in the Bible that instructs us on how, when and why we take the communion. However, none of these instructions gives us the right to add or change the ritual that has already been given to us by God through His inspired word.

The Bible gives us two significant observances that remember and celebrate both the death of Christ as well as our resurrection with Him. These two perfectly summarize the core aspects of our religion and we do not need anything more to enhance it.

## WHY DID JESUS'S HUMAN NATURE AGREE TO GIVE UP HIS LIFE?

Answer: He did so because He knew what God's will was.

<sup>41</sup> And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." <sup>43</sup> Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. <sup>44</sup> And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.  
- Luke 22:41-44

His question to God and His struggle was human. His submission was from His human side. Jesus did it because He knew that this is what God wanted, and He wanted to do the will of God. He was able to do so because He had no sin to weaken Him or spoil the offering of His perfect life, I Peter 2:22.

It was a was a struggle because He was a man and it is innately human to resist torture and crucifixion. Had the story of the last few hours of His life been that He was calm and had no feelings about what was to happen, we would doubt that Jesus was both fully divine as well as fully human. However, His advantage was that His humanity was not weakened by sin of any kind and thus His personal holiness and purity enabled Him to sacrifice His life through a painful death because of His love for the Father and sinful mankind.

## HOW CAN GOD DIE IF JESUS IS GOD?

Answer: The fact that Jesus was a divine being who inhabited a fully human body answers this question. In John 1:1-18, *"in the beginning was God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* The life that Jesus offered on the cross was a human life, not a divine one. Divinity is eternal, and not subject to the experience of death.

The divine being that took on the person of Jesus permitted the human part of His nature to experience fatigue, anger, sorrow, even death so that He could offer a perfect and fully human sacrifice to pay for man's sins.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and might free those who through fear of

death were subject to slavery all their lives.  
- Hebrews 2:14-15

Because people are afraid of death, they commit all kinds of sin. They're greedy. They're worldly. They're immoral. Why? Because the inevitability of death moves people to try everything they can while alive, even things that are forbidden by God. The Law demanded the offering of a perfect human life as payment for the sins of mankind and Jesus is sent by God to offer what was required, a perfect human life. However, the fact that Jesus was Divine gave His human life an innate value that was worth the life of every human being that ever lived. This is why His sacrifice pays the debt of sin not only for one sinner but for all sinners who ever lived.

## HOW LONG WAS JESUS IN THE GRAVE?

Answer: The Bible says that Jesus Himself claimed that He would be killed and raised three days later.

For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later."  
- Mark 9:31

Jesus was crucified on the Friday, and He rose on the Sunday, John 20:1. In answering this question it is important to understand how the Jews counted days.

- Thursday Sundown to Friday Sundown, is one day. – Jesus is put in the grave.
- Friday Sundown to Saturday Sundown, is another day.
- Saturday Sundown to Sunday Sundown, makes a third day. – Jesus is raised from the dead.

I would say three days, two nights, but Jesus said three days.

## WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

I saved this question for last because it provides a natural ending to this book. There is no passage in the New Testament that addresses this question directly, but there are several that give us insight as to what our relationships might be.

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

- Matthew 22:30

Here, Jesus says that we will be like angels in nature. This is a clue. What, therefore, do we know about angels?

- Angels know the difference between one human being and another, and they interact with humans. The angel Gabriel knew it was Mary, he knew who she was. Did he not also go see Elizabeth? He knew the difference between Mary and Elizabeth, he interacted with them, so obviously angels can interact with humans.
- Angels also have the ability to interact with different individuals, they are not simply spirit power without consciousness.
- Angels also interact with other angels and spirit beings, and they can distinguish from among them. Michael, for example, and Satan disputed over Moses's body, Jude 1:9. We know that the Angel of the Lord, referring to Michael the archangel, was a prince of nations, Daniel 10:21.
- There is a hierarchy of angels, and they have a certain relationship with people and with nations. If angels have recognition skills and are able to communicate with humans and as well as other spirits, according to Jesus it is reasonable to conclude that we also will have these abilities.

Remember, we are going to be transformed into the perfect version of ourselves, not different versions. I'll become the perfect version of myself that God has in mind, I'm not going to become something or someone else. What's the point? Where's the joy? If I'm someone else and have a

different consciousness, where is my joy? My joy is that I remember being a sinner, I remember being saved, I remember being faithful to the Lord and serving Him, and now everything He said to me that would happen is happening, and I'm rejoicing. What will be eliminated are sin and death, not our uniqueness as beings.

<sup>1</sup> Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, <sup>2</sup> in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; <sup>4</sup> they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

- Revelation 22:1-5

The Bible says that once in heaven our focus will not be on ourselves or on our loved ones, whether we recognize them or not. Our focus, our devotion and joy, will come from our ability to face the Son of God and glory in His life forever. I'm persuaded that the attraction and the love we have for our families and spouses will pale in comparison to the radiant beauty and joy produced by our presence before the Lord. In my opinion the purpose for our knowing each other in heaven will be to share the unfathomable joy we experience in knowing God forever. Like all good things, they are enhanced when shared with another.



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