

December, 2005

Pause Ponder Profit

Christ And The Church

by Lowel Blasingame

One of the most beautiful dissertations on the church is given by the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:23-32. Five times in this section Paul refers to "the church" (v. 23, 24, 25, 29, 32). In keeping with his use of a definite article, "the" and the singular noun, "church," inspiration uses a singular antecedent, "it" (v. 25, 26, 27). Christ in His relationship to it "is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body," (v. 23). Please note the unity of design, it is "the head" and "the body." A head having multiple bodies or a body having multiple heads would be a freak or irregular and abnormal. Catholicism makes the Lord's church abnormal by giving it two heads, Christ the invisible head in heaven and the pope, the visible head upon the earth. Denominationalism makes an absurdity of it by having Christ's being the head of 2,000 denominations, so in this Christ, the head, has 2,000 bodies that wear varying names,—— Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, etc., that are attached to Him!

The Holy Spirit says that the church is the spiritual body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and that there is one body (Eph.

4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13) and "But now are they many members, yet but one body," (1 Cor. 12:20). The members that make up the one body are not varying denominations, (1) because no denominations existed during the first century when the New Testament was being written, and (2) because individuals are identified as being the members making up the body. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular," (1 Cor. 12:27). One enters the one body by being baptized into it (1 Cor. 12:13) and its individuals, not denominations that do this.

Does not the variety of names given churches indicate the existence of differing churches in the New Testament? For example, Paul sent a letter to "the church of God" at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), while churches of Christ sent greetings to Rome (Rom. 16:16) and Timothy was taught to "behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15). Do we not have four different denominations named here that make up the one body of Christ? Certainly not. Suppose I introduce you to Jane Doe, the wife of John, the daughter in law of Bill, the mother of Sally, the aunt of Tom and the cousin of Sue?

How many Jane Does did you meet? You understand that there was just one person but that she was identified in different relationships but that did not make multiple persons of her. The same is true of the Lord's church. It may be identified as to its location, its builder or the Architect that designed and planned its building or the people composing it but they make up one body, produced by the same seed (Matt. 13:19 and teach and practice the same things (Phil. 3:16).



Works And Salvation

by Lowel Blasingame

There is a marked difference between saying, “**There is nothing that one can do to earn or merit his salvation,**” and in saying, “**There is nothing that one can do in being saved.**” The first statement does not take into consideration the fact that obedience to God’s commands aren’t works that merit or earn for the obedient what God has promised **but are tests of our faith.**

That obedience to God is necessary is indisputable. Samuel told Saul, who had not obeyed the Lord in utterly destroying the Amalekites, that “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams,” (1 Sam. 15:22). Isaiah appealed to sinful Israel saying, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if you refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it,” (Isa. 1:19-20). When the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains and wouldn’t allow them to come down into the valley, the Lord told them that they were to make no leagues with the inhabitants of the land and to tear down their altars “but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this?” (Judges 2:2).

The New Testament under which we live is equally clear in emphasizing the necessity of obedience. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven,” (Matt. 7:21). Peter asks the question, “—what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17), and Paul supplies the answer, “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, **and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,**” (2 Thess. 1:8). The Hebrew writer said that Christ is the author “of eternal salvation unto

all them that obey Him,” (Heb. 5:9). John said that those who “**do His commandments**” have a **right to the tree of life and enter the city (Rev. 22:14)**. Please note that these aren’t acts of obedience in order to obtain a reward but to enter into the kingdom of heaven, to be saved (because the gospel is God’s power for salvation, Rom. 1:16), and in order to enter the city and have a right to the tree of life. I point this out because some contend that acts of obedience are in order to receive a reward, not to be saved.

Our obedience to God’s commands aren’t works designed to merit or earn salvation, **they are tests of our faith.** God told Joshua, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. This shall thou do six days,” (Josh. 6:1-5). On the seventh day they were to compass the city seven time, the priest sound the ram’s horns and trumpets and the people give a shout. Suppose Joshua had said. Hold on. Lord, You said You were giving the city into our hands, if we do all this, will not we be receiving it by works? Israel marched around the walls as God commanded and the Hebrew writer said, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, **after they were compassed about seven days,**” (Heb. 11:30). The conditions imposed by the Lord were tests of their faith and they did not receive the promised gift until they did what God commanded.

Had Joshua said. Lord, I have a better plan. I’ll erect altars on the north, east, west and south sides of Jericho and the priests will offer sacrifices morning and evening, — do you think the walls of Jericho would have fallen? Certainly not, that would have been a self devised work of man’s righteousness and that in the sight of God is as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). It would not have been a test of faith because God did not command doing that. It’s works of God’s righteous that we must

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do (Acts 10:34-35) and which, without our doing our faith is dead and will not save (James 2:17, 24).

Baptism A Work Of Righteousness

by Lowel Blasingame

When Jesus came to John to be baptized of him, John's reaction was, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" John's baptism was "for the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4) and he knew that Christ had no sins to remit. This explains his reaction to the Lord's request. Jesus replied, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill righteousness. Then he suffered Him," (Matt. 3:14-16). From Christ's baptism we conclude that submission to this command is the performance of a work of righteousness.

Later, Christ was asked by the chief priests and elders about His authority for teaching in the temple, and who had given Him this authority. His reply was that He would answer their question if they would answer one for Him. Then He asked, "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" If they conceded that John's baptism was divinely authorized, they foresaw His asking, "Why did ye not believe him?" The common people believed John's message and submitted to his baptism but the Jewish leaders had rejected it (Lk. 7:29-30). If they said that it was of man, they would lose popularity among the people for they received him as a prophet from God. Either answer posed a dilemma for them so they replied that they didn't know. Jesus saw their dishonesty and replied that He would not tell them by what authority He taught there.

Three facts emerge from this: (1) John's baptism was from heaven meaning, it was divinely authorized; (2) since all of God's commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172) and John's baptism was authorized by God, it was a work of righteousness; (3) by submitting to John's baptism, Christ would be performing a work of righteousness authorized by His Heavenly Father. Had John's baptism been "of men" and not "from heaven," and the Lord submitted to it He would have been performing a work of man's righteousness, not one of God's.

While our salvation isn't by works of righteousness which we have done (Tit 3:4-5), meaning by our doing what we think or feel is right for salvation for our works, those we devise and substitute or God's, are as "filthy rags" to Him (Isa. 64:6) but the performance of His works of righteousness makes us acceptable to Him (Ac. 10:34-35). If the baptism of John was from heaven and it was necessary to obey it to "fulfill all righteousness," how much more must this be true of the baptism commanded by our risen Lord (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16) and who commanded such on the grounds that "all authority in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18) had been given to Him. Sure, being baptized is performing a work of righteousness but, like John's baptism, its one "from heaven" and not "of men." Jesus said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say," (Lk. 6:46). He saves those who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9) or fulfill righteousness as he did.

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