

# The Value of the Gospel

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Joseph Walker, of Hampton

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"For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." 1 Cor. 1: 2

The salvation of the soul is of infinitely more importance than a cultivated intellect. While I would not neglect the latter, I would by all means secure the former. Life, eternal life, is the united wish of our race; but the receiving of it, is suspended on the condition, that they gain a knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. To this truth, he who spake as never yet man spake, testifies, in the following words: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." John 17:3

From the text, we deduce the following proposition as the theme of the present discourse:

## **I. The preached Gospel is the only medium by which to obtain a saving knowledge of God.**

This proposition, we conceive, comprises the real doctrine in the passage. From it we ascertain that human wisdom cannot trace fully, in the works of nature, the character and requisitions of God. The phrase, "in the wisdom of God," stands for external nature. The effect is put for the cause. From every object above, beneath, and around us, shines conspicuously the wisdom of God.

Hence a sanctified heart may still exclaim, "O Lord how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all." But as the world by their wisdom, could not arrive at a saving knowledge of God, by contemplating his wisdom, or the works of creation, (for this is the sense of the text) he ordained the preaching of the Gospel as the medium of that knowledge.

By the Gospel, we mean that system of principles, precepts, moral duties, and heavenly promises, which were originated by Jesus Christ, and are recorded in the sacred oracles.

By preaching, we understand the means of communicating this system of truth to man, whether through the press, by signs, or by oral proclamation and exposition. To make known the Gospel in any way is to preach it. This, as our proposition imports, is the only way of imparting and receiving that knowledge of God, which induces salvation. If it be not, then there is some other medium.

But where shall we find it? Shall we copy the example of the ancients, and more recently, of enlightened France, and depend on the magic power of reason to unfold the way of life? If the Gospel be not the medium of saving

knowledge, then indeed, we have no supposable alternative in the universe, save the endowments of the mind. We shall therefore inquire whether the mind is able, by the exertion of its powers, to make one wise unto salvation.

Solomon says, "that which is to be, hath already been," and as it regards the ability of human reason, as connected with the present state of existence, to discover the true character of God, I think it may be said, that which hath not been will never be. Reason is uniform in her operations. She draws her conclusions from impressions made on the mind by external objects. Hence under similar circumstances, we may expect her decisions to be the same now as formerly. She contemplates the material universe.

The millions of creatures, subsisting in the world, of various shapes, and different habits of life, are subjects for her research. The geological structure of the earth from its surface to its centre (if man could reach that) furnishes ground for unending speculations. The mountains, piercing the clouds, and the rivers which sweep over the plains, till lost in the soundless deep, interest and astonish the mind.

The architecture of the heavens, and other phenomena which might be named, force from it, by involuntary constraint, the admission that there is a God - Yea, a God omnipotent, and beholding in all things the adaptation of means to ends, a God omniscient. Moreover, if the mind marks the successions of the seasons, seed time and harvest, and the careful provision made for both man and beast, it must allow also a God of providence.

These are some of the data, from the consideration of which, reason is to make her deductions concerning the moral nature of God, and man's obligation to hint as a holy Being.

But all this testimony has existed from the beginning of time. What has it done in the way of guiding lost sinners to a haven of rest? Has it left on the soul a correct impression of the moral perfections of Jehovah? The super-excellence of his character? His untarnished purity matchless holiness? Consummate goodness? No, never since the fall have these sublime qualities been evolved by reasoning skill. Although the heavens have always declared the glory of God, and the firmament hath shadowed forth his handiwork, man by this light alone has never admired the holy nature of God, nor contracted a love for his laws.

The wisest of men, giants in ancient lore, have practiced cruelty, indulged in revelry, and entertained the most absurd notions of the Divine nature. Isolated reason, that "celestial lamp," as some enthusiasts were wont to call it, never taught Greek, Roman, nor Carthaginian a correct knowledge of the true God. Those profound thinkers whom Paul addressed from Mars Hill, were in total darkness touching the real condition of their souls.

In science they were adepts. The specimens of art strewed lavishly throughout their cities, bore witness to their claims. They could boast also of philosophers, of poets, and of orators. But, proud of their high distinction, they despised the simplicity of the Gospel. Speaking of Paul, its advocate, in language of the keenest sarcasm—they asked, "What will this babbling say?" To them, those cultivated, boastful Greeks, Paul answered: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious: for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD...Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." Acts 17:22-23

Go to the most refined nation on the globe, and if the Bible be wanting, you shall find the people in the ignorance and slavery of sin. Nor has a saving acquaintance with God ever been formed where the word of life has not first been held forth. Judging then of the future by the past, human reason is incompetent to lead us to the Rock whence saving comforts flow. If left to her teachings only, man must grope his way in the dark, and, in the end, lose himself amid the mazes of his own speculations. Instead of consecrated temples, on whose altars are offered the affections of contrite hearts, this happy country might be studded with pedestals, and images, at which would be practiced the miserable service of idolatry.

**II. In the second place we sustain the proposition, that the Gospel is the only medium of a saving knowledge of God.**

This will appear, if we notice:

**1. The design of its doctrines.** There are certain principles which form the groundwork of Christianity. They teach man what he is, his danger, and what has been done for his soul. By the development of these, the soul is roused from its stupor, wooed from earth to heaven, and finally made happy in the Lord.

Firstly, the Gospel defines clearly the relation man sustains to God and a future state. If, through the Old Testament, we look by faith, on the green fields of Eden, with its rivers and fountains, its pleasant groves and delicious fruits;—if in that Paradise, man appears the noblest of creation's works; the offspring of a just, holy, and glorious God, loving righteousness, and obeying the edicts of his Maker with delight;—in the New especially, the picture is reversed.

In it he is called the child of the devil, rebellious, obstinate, and hostile to purity and holy worship. His present relation to God is that of an enemy. The future threatens him with interminable death! To be assured of his real condition, his darkened understanding, perverted affections, and the soul's tendency to irrevocable ruin, is the first element of saving knowledge. Till quickened by the Gospel, man seems unconscious of the turpitude of his guilt.

Charmed perpetually by the old serpent, the devil, he is in danger of sinking hoodwinked down to hell. Hence, to save, is first to convince him of his peril. And not only to convince, but also to arrest him in his course, that he may survey the path along which he is rushing blindly into the "bottomless pit." The faithful exhibition of the divine Word has often proved competent to this result. Nor need we wonder, if we consider the momentous truths it discloses in which we are so fearfully interested.

The sentence, "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," is enough in itself to make one tremble for his safety. While, as if waked from the torpor of death, he asks, "How can these things be?" He may well suspect that all is not right. Strange things, indeed, have sounded in his ears, to which the understanding cannot well be indifferent. It is more than half convinced that the statement just made, implying depravity of heart, and, by consequence, alienation from God, is a solemn reality.

If, in connection with the affirmation made by the Savior to Nicodemus, the Gospel thunder,—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." and this again be followed by the ominous announcement, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"—why, the relation man holds to God and a future state, is clearly developed. Either by implication or direct teaching, he is everywhere in the Gospel exhibited as a wretched, condemned, lost any moment to be struck down and sunk to endless woe!

Here then the sinner is brought into a sad strait. Above, is the sword of Divine vengeance, gleaming ethereal fire; from underneath, are heard the mutterings of that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; while all around him, there arises an impervious wall of sin. This is the light in which the sinner must see, and, to some extent feel himself, in order to salvation. Like Isaiah, he must become willing to confess, "that he is a man of unclean lips;" or like Job, that he is "vile;" for such is his exact relation to the "Lord of hosts."

Secondly, through the Gospel we learn the ground of deliverance from guilt. By the first item of saving knowledge, the sinner's fears become excited. It cannot be otherwise. Though the convictions, which distress his soul are essential to his acceptance, yet he can see in them naught but threatening evil. Behind him is a polluted life; above, he sees a holy God; in front, all is darkness!

For the first time in his life he is overtaken by the storm of God's wrath. The tempest increases in fury and blackness! God's fiery indignation flashes deep into his soul. His first inquiry is how he shall be rescued. Surround a man

with danger and he attempts escape. Release from peril is the desire universal. When calamity threatens, the mind seeks to avert the catastrophe.

But poor wretch! What shall he do? Whither flee? His own righteousness can no longer shield him from the pelting storm. Every step of his way has been stained with guilt. To his astonishment he has found that in him there dwelleth no good thing. Nor can he forget his convictions. As easily could the dying man forget the fever which drinks up his blood. Where shall he obtain relief?

Blessed be God! The remedy is at hand. The Gospel, if it kills, can also make alive. If it wound, it can cure. God has "laid help upon one who is mighty to save." Even on Jesus, "the mediator of the new covenant." The cross, suspending the Savior, as an offering for sin, a ransom for ruined man, has all this time been overlooked. The troubled soul, in its agony, has not looked out of itself.

As soon, however, as it turns to Calvary, where Jesus groaned, bled, and yielded up the ghost—an event in which were concentrated the patience, obedience, compassion and love of Christ, it must relent. In that stupendous scene the sinner sees justice satisfied! He learns that God in Christ can be just, and, at the same time, justify the transgressor. That all God requires is the hearty belief of this great truth. Unwavering confidence in the atonement as God's method of salvation will make the moral thunder cease, the clouds of despair to scatter, and the cross of salvation to loom out of the thick darkness!

In no system of philosophy can such help be found. Man, encased in depravity, dreamed not of assistance from any source.

This provision for lost souls had its origin in the Divine compassion. "When there was no eye to pity and no arm to save," "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Hear testimony on this point. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." "He was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification."

Surely, here is news for the weeping sinner! "As cold water to a thirsty soul," so must this be to his troubled spirit! Here, at the cross, he may sit, wonder, admire, and adore that Love, which made so merciful a provision for his poor soul. But,

Thirdly, it is in the Gospel that Divine aid is promised to promote our return to God. Its necessity comports both with reason and revelation. If needless, it had not been tendered. God has never revealed a superfluous doctrine. To appreciate the importance of the Spirit in the work of conversion, we may only consider our degradation and helplessness. Who that views man, steeped in pollution—waging war against all good, but must see the necessity of Divine interposition to turn him from the error of his ways?

The reclaiming a soul from a life of the deepest corruption to uprightness of heart, is an inexplicable enigma, unless we ascribe the change to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. This passage, however, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit," unfolds the mystery. God, the Spirit is the author of the change.

With a resurrection voice does he call the corrupting Lazarus from the tomb of spiritual death. Loose him, he says, from the integuments of sin, and let him go. By this power only does the soul lift itself from the earth and "arise to newness of life."

"Not of blood, is one born, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of God." It is this supernatural agency, operating through the preached word, which discovers to a man his true relation to eternal things; enables him to repose confidence in Jesus; sanctifies, and so prepares him for heaven. It is the Spirit who communicates a spiritual taste, enlightens our darkened understandings, and gives simplicity to many passages in the Scriptures, which, without his influence, might appear dark and perplexing.

Show me a man, then, whose once ferocious temper is subdued into mildness; who, instead of clanning with the wicked, fills his place in the Lord's house; who, by every act of his life, exhibits humility, and a sense of unworthiness in the sight of his Divine Father; and in him you have an individual, renovated by the saving influences of the Holy Spirit. The word was rendered effectual by his sealing power, and so a soul was taken from the "miry clay," and established firmly on the rock Christ Jesus.

Man's exact relation to God and the future—the ground of his deliverance from "the wrath to come"—and the power by which he is quickened into holiness, are items of knowledge, essential to his happiness and ultimate redemption.

**2. That the Gospel is the only medium of saving knowledge, is plain from the intention of its ordinances.** Connected with the new dispensation are two positive institutions. Baptism, the first, is a rite, denoting a change of heart, supposed to have taken place in the individual submitting to it. A change by reason of which, the understanding is made to acquiesce in, and the affections to harmonize with, the revealed will of God.

The immersion of a believer in water represents the soul cleansed of its guilt—raised from a death of sin, to a life of purity. It is in figure what the burial and resurrection of Christ were literally. It also points to the general resurrection. Human redemption will not be completed till the dead shall be raised at the last day. Though the soul soars to realms of bliss, and is present with the Lord the moment after death, yet till the body glorified shall be united to it, the great end of Christ's mission into the world will not be consummated.

The general resurrection, however, will as certainly come to pass as that Christ himself was raised from the sepulchre. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." When that glorious period shall have arrived, then shall it be said, "Death is swallowed up in victory." His sting extracted, the grave conquered, man will stand disenthralled from the results of the transgression.

How accurately, how consolingly, and how beautifully, does the immersion of a believer delineate death and victory in their several fowls! Speak we of the burial and resurrection of Christ? The immersion in and the raising a proper subject out of the water represents them. Or of a death to sin and a resurrection unto holiness? This same ordinance declares them. Or of that day "when all that are in their graves, shall hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth?" In this sublime institution, we have it in figure.

The Lord's Supper is both commemorative and prophetic. It looks back to the cross, and forward "to the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ." It stands, at the same time, for the cause and the fruition of our hope. As oft conducted, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "As ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come."

These rites present the professor before the world, as "a new creature." They imply a death to sin, a resurrection unto life, and point to Christ as "the author and finisher" of the Christian faith. Therefore being connected only with the Gospel, and drawing the line between the Church and the world, they testify to the Gospel as the only medium by which to obtain a saving knowledge of God.

**3. Our proposition is sustained in the unparalleled success of the Gospel.** God honors truth with the seal of his approbation. Error, except when aided by persecution, progresses slowly. Mohamed toiled a long time before the sentiments of the Koran took root. Nor, till enforced by the threat of arms, did the Arabians receive them. The "Romish Church," by bribery, intimidation, and torture, sought to subvert the truth as it is in Jesus. But his words, "Fear not little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," had gone forth. Therefore her machinations against his cause proved fruitless.

Consult history, sacred and profane, for the effects resulting from the proclamation of the Gospel. No carnal weapons, no parade of wealth and lordly equipage;—no artifice and cunning craftiness were employed: no Mohameds, Charlemagnes, nor mitred Pontiffs were needed to compel acquiescence.

The plain, pathetic story of Christ crucified, and Christ raised from the dead, was enough to win thousands over to the Christian Faith. The simple preaching of unpretending men, could heave the bosoms and start the tear, and extort the cry: "What shall we do?" "What must I do to be saved?"

In a short while Jerusalem was filled with their doctrine. First three thousand, then five thousand, and daily such as should be saved, were added to the Church. By this amazing process, by men called foolishness, the Divine Message was sent towards all parts of the earth. Like a fructuous vine, whose roots fasten in a rich soil, its tendrils took hold on Asia, Africa, Europe, and finally, America. To this day, as in Samaria of old, the people, "believing the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, are baptized both men and women." Every week do we hear of revivals and large ingatherings, from different parts of the world.

What conclusion shall we draw from hence? What other can we than that a knowledge and power are communicated through the Gospel, procurable from no other source. It is emphatically, though mysteriously, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."

The only reasons given, for the adoption of this method in preference to any other, are the pleasure of God, and the ignorance of the human race. The text supposes the energy and acuteness of human intellect to have been fully tested. "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

In whatever aspect we regard the Gospel, whether in the light of its doctrines, ordinances, or success, it plainly exhibits itself, as the only medium by which to obtain a saving knowledge of God.

### **III. Having established our proposition, we, in the last place, proceed to some inferences.**

If the Gospel be the only medium of salvation, then it should be preached. Though it contains all the principles needed to reconcile man to his God, still he must be informed of them, and become interested in them.

The Gospel has not intrinsically the power either of locomotion or speech. God has originated the plan of human redemption, taught the doctrines, precepts, and general duties growing out of it, but these will avail nothing unless they be published. Because of this, our Savior when on earth, not only died for the world but sent out preachers to proclaim salvation to all who should believe, to call home the wandering sheep to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. "How," asks Holy writ, "shall they hear without a preacher?" Preaching, (by which we here mean oral proclamation) is God's peculiar method, as explicitly set forth in the text.

It ought to be published in its native purity. If it be the word of inspiration, then is it perfect. It needs not embellishment, enlargement, nor simplicity. Coming from God who knows what is in man, it must be in all respects adapted to our wants. Its doctrines should be assented to, and its ordinances practiced, just as they are revealed, without hesitation or doubt. And so doubtless they would be, if the heralds of the cross would maintain uniformly, a pure speech.

It was the boast of Paul that he could say for himself and his coadjutors: "We are not as many who corrupt the word." Would that the same might be said now! But alas, the interests, ignorance, or prejudices of some, who cry from the watchtowers, influence them either to conceal a part of the message, or, which is the same thing, give it a wrong interpretation. Woe! to that minister who shall mislead immortal souls! Woe! Woe! to those blind guides who tamper with eternal things and cause the unwary to err. To perpetuate a pure Gospel among us, as Baptists, two things are required.

**1. We want competent, dauntless teachers: "Faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."** Men who shall possess, not only a stock of general literature, but also who can expound the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel with clearness and eject. I object not to a cultivated fancy, a finished style, nor the graces of oratory: these are desirable accomplishments. But, above all, let the sense of the text be given.

If a man's imagination permits, let him explore the universe, and bring illustrations from her abundant treasure-house, but let him also be careful, lest, amid the flourish of rhetoric, he conceal the CROSS. "Sound speech that cannot be condemned," is the most efficient preaching. But in order to that apprehension of the truth, and the exercise of those dispositions of soul which qualify for the pulpit, the minister must be a constant, laborious, prayerful, Bible-student. In the law of the Lord, "must he meditate day and night." The chief concerns of his heart should be, to give the world an uncorrupted Gospel, and to rescue dying men from a threatening perdition. Therefore we remark,

**2. That ministers must be supported.** I mean not that they shall receive princely incomes. That, like the aristocratic prelates of England, they must have a seat in Parliament, and burden the people with taxes: but only, that they may be so far relieved from secular toil, as to give themselves wholly to the sacred ministry. I object not to minister farmers, or minister school-teachers, if necessity compel to these vocations; but certainly, it would promote the diffusion of an unadulterated Gospel and effective preaching, if the Churches would disencumber their pastors from the world.

Compel a minister to some temporal pursuit for the maintenance of his family, and you detract from his usefulness. The mind, to develop its powers, requires patient and vigorous exercise. It must first perceive truth and then study how it may impart its perception to others with perspicuity and force. These studies comprise its weekly employments for the pulpit.

How can tasks, so arduous, so responsible, be mastered in the broken intervals of labor and worldly care? Necessarily under such circumstances, "the man of God" often appears before his congregation, having for it no definite message. He says something and his audience hears it, but it is thrown off in such an unconnected, digressive manner, that the understanding, unable to comprehend him, grows weary and indifferent. Thus a Sabbath is lost; the people disperse unbenefited, and souls die unreconciled to Christ!

Moreover, compulsion to manual labor, or mercantile pursuits, subjects the pastor to censure. If he have to present bills, press accounts, and attend courts, his character will be assailed by the designing, and the dishonest. Though he were as pure as an angel, yet would the enemies of Christ impugn his motives, should his necessary transactions conflict with their interests.

Thus he would lose his influence, and the devil obtains a victory. Take away his influence, and you render him inefficient. As well might you wrest from the soldier his armor, and expect him to conquer in battle, as to expect that a preacher can benefit a community without influence. The way to perpetuate this moral power is to let his intercourse with the world arise mainly from his official duties.

Then, brethren, as ye love a pure Gospel, and yourselves have felt its power, look out men of honest report; educate and support them; and let them proclaim untrammelled the merits of a Savior's love.



# Gnostic Corruption in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century\_\_

Thomas Armitage, D.D.

From the book, *The History of the Baptists, 1886*

It would require a volume to trace the corruption of Christianity with Platonism, for we have this heresy in germ in the Apostolic Churches long before the Gnostics injected it into the truth at Alexandria, as the exalters and defenders of knowledge against faith.

Paul found it creeping in at Crete, Colosse and Ephesus.

The ideas of Pythagorus had prepared its way in Crete, Ephesus was the center of all pretentious philosophy, and Colosse was full of Phrygian pantheism entwined with the mysteries of Pan, Cybele and Bacchus. All these were dexterously interwoven into Christianity by Simon Magus, the real father of Christianized Gnosticism; others fostered it, and Manes led it to full manhood by the end of the third century. Paul saw its drift and warned Timothy against the opposition air knowledge falsely so called.

At first it was simple, without system or great power, never arraying itself openly against the truth; hence, its danger lay not in the violence of its attacks, but in its secret aggressions. Hippolytus calls it a 'hydra' which had been pushing its way in the dark for many years; but no error matched it in efficiency. In his time it had corrupted between thirty and forty sects and subjects who differed amongst themselves, all holding principles contrary to the simple faith of Christ and putting it under the control of Oriental paganism.

Gnosis of Alexandria is not easily defined; for it was a compound of monotheism, materialism, pantheism and spiritualism, taken from the heart of Platonism and the reasoning of Aristotle, with an admixture of native Egyptian thought.

It professed to be the essence of intelligence, and so won the learned by its liberal speculations, the rationalist by its mastery of all logic, the superstitious by its many mysteries and the ignorant by its pretense, that it explained everything. The Greek philosophy was too narrow for its tastes, and the teachings of Jesus too practical for its uses, so it made sad havoc of Homer's pure literature and Christ's plain revelations. It refused to take anything in the proper and natural meaning of its words, and its allegory distorted everything by the attempt to transfigure its simplicity.

Hippolytus says that the whole system reminded him of Thales, who, "Looking toward heaven, alleging that he was carefully examining supernal objects, fell into a well; and a certain maid, Thratta, remarked of him derisively that while intent on beholding things in heaven, he did not know what was at his feet."

At the opening of the fourth century none of the Churches were entirely free from this corrupt leaven. It affected their doctrine and practice, had created an aristocracy in their ministry, pushed aside the letter of Scripture in sublimating its interpretation in relation to the person of God, of Christ, good and evil, incarnation and atonement; and had left but little in the Gospel unchanged, either in theory or experience.

Almost all the African fathers had gone after it, and it had produced swarms of monastic orders in Greece, Gaul and Italy. Worse than this, it had destroyed the common bond of brotherhood between the rich and poor; and because of its pomp, ceremony, symbol, mystery and liturgical worship, it had found that favor with the nobles which exalted Christ's religion into an awful sacredness, and well nigh made the Church a secret society, which now cared little to up-lift the slave, the poor and the downtrodden.

This explains why Christianity took the shape that it did in its final struggle with paganism. Having corrupted itself and become weak, the steps were easy to popular influence, and the unity of the temporal with the spiritual power.

For forty years the law of Gallienus had recognized the Christians as a legal community. They had become numerous and influential. In the great cities they had large and costly temples furnished with vessels of gold and silver; their faith was much the rising fashion; the army, the civil service, the court, were filled with Christians, and the old Christ-likeness had nearly gone.



## Separation Applied

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Dennis W. Costella

Available in Tract Form. Contact the Editor.

***The fundamentalist is not trying to be unloving, schismatic or exclusive. He simply desires to be obedient to the Lord and His Word above all else!***

### **The Principle of Biblical Separation**

**T**he Biblical doctrine of separation is based on one of God's essential attributes - HIS HOLINESS. He never looks upon sin with the least degree of tolerance, and this necessarily extends to His will concerning the conduct of His children. As believers, we are called unto fellowship with God who..."is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." I John 1:5, 6.

Therefore, there is an absolute necessity for separation from whatever is "darkness;" that is, whatever is in direct opposition to His very nature. The will of God for the saint is ever the same: "...be ye HOLY in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye HOLY; for I am HOLY." I Peter 1:15, 16.

Most believers agree that the Bible teaches the principle of separation - but comparatively few seem concerned about the need for its personal application. This is especially true when our fellowships and associations are examined.

All too often, the things we feel are most loving, expedient or non-divisive determine what we consider to be God's will in any given situation. But this is a grievous error if the result of such reasoning is contrary to the plain teaching of the Word of God. We would do well to carefully consider what the Bible teaches about "separation," and then direct our walk accordingly!

The believer's separation from evil and every false way is always God's order. We were called to be separated unto Christ and declared positionally sanctified "in Him" the moment we believed and were saved. In our Christian lives we are admonished to walk in a sanctified, separated manner which is worthy of our "...high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

And when our Lord comes back again and catches away His Bride, we will be partakers of that great, final separation! Yes, indeed, separation is a precious Biblical truth - past, present and future!

### **The Practice of Biblical Separation**

Although the doctrine of separation is a dominant theme throughout the Scriptures, the difficulty comes, as mentioned before, in its application. The prohibition of participation in, and even identification with, blatant godlessness and unbelief is readily accepted as a Biblical imperative.

Yet, at the same time, many Christians find it more of a problem to understand why we are also commanded by God to have NO FELLOWSHIP with ANYONE or ANYTHING disobedient to the Word of God, even if this means we must separate from errant fellow believers and compromised Christian organizations and ministries. God's directive for the believer in respect to evil is the same whether the leaven is found without (Luke 12:1) or within (I Corinthians 5:6-8) the Church.

The first aspect of this doctrine is separation from the evil of the world, and from all unbelieving individuals and organizations. II Corinthians 6:14-18 plainly states that the believer must not be "unequally yoked together (fellowship, association or identification) with unbelievers... but is to "come out from among them, and be ye SEPARATE."

A fundamentalist must never join with any man or organization where those represented are not clear in their testimony of the new birth, or their strict adherence to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith. Any common endeavor (worship, evangelism, education, relief, dialogue, etc.) would be in direct conflict with this Biblical commandment. Such activities, when undertaken, identify Christians with the liberal, apostate position of unbelievers.

Our responsibility, however, does not stop there.

Ephesians 5:11 commands us to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather REPROVE them." We must not only separate from all groups riddled with unbelief, such as the National and World Councils of Churches, but we must also vehemently sound a warning to other believers who might be drawn subtly into complicity with the ecumenical apostasy. False religious leaders may present an amiable and pious exterior, but our duty is still to expose and oppose their unbiblical practices which deceive the unwary. I Timothy 6:3-5 and II Timothy 3:5.

A heretic who denies a fundamental doctrine of the Christian Faith is to be rejected, not embraced! Titus 3:10. A Bible believer must not find himself in common cause with such individuals, whether it is by ecclesiastical affiliation, or by any form of joint ministry or worship.

The clear call is for everyone who names the Name of Christ to separate himself from every dishonorable vessel, that is, those who have turned away from the truth of the infallible Word. Only then will the believer be "meet (worthy) for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work." Only then will he have fellowship "with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." A believer cannot be in fellowship with the apostasy and with the Lord at the same time! Read carefully II Timothy 2:19-22.

Withdrawal from counterfeit, apostate Christianity, however, is not the only application of this doctrine.. Separation from disobedient brethren is also a Biblical imperative! It is precisely at this point that many believers turn away from the plain teaching of God's Word and substitute their own faulty reasoning.

Today, there is an abundance of disobedient brethren who are so designated by the Word of God because of their refusal to separate from false teachers and apostate affiliations as previously mentioned, For them, the desire for visible unity, respectability, popularity or success, or the avoidance of appearing to be "schismatic" or "too negative" takes precedence over simple obedience to the Bible. They may even seek to justify their disobedience on the basis of love or opportunities to witness. But it is still disobedience, and God says we are not to walk in fellowship with disobedient brethren. We are to separate from them. II Thessalonians 3:6, 14, 15.

There is no such thing as so-called "first and second degree separation," just BIBLICAL separation!

There are, for example, many brethren in the National Association of Evangelicals who say and do many commendable things. But no matter how much "good" may appear to be accomplished, the fact does not change that by their very association with this middle-of-the-road organization they are repudiating Biblical separation. Refusing to obey the call to be separate is SIN - whether it involves failure to separate from a false teacher or a disobedient brother. Compromised "evangelical" organizations like the NAE may present an impressive outward display of numbers and strength, but it is not a Scriptural unity. It cannot be pleasing to God when there is not, first of all, an agreement on - and then practice of - the TRUTH! Amos 3:3.

Romans 16:17 commands us to "mark them (point them out) which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and AVOID them." The fundamentalist (who, by definition, is one who practices Biblical separation) is not the one who causes divisions between believers.

Divisions are caused by the brother who does not practice sound doctrine - the doctrine of separation is no exception - and the fundamentalist is required to separate from him. The fundamentalist is not trying to be unloving, schismatic or exclusive. He simply desires to be obedient to the Lord and His Word ABOVE ALL ELSE!

### **The Purpose of Biblical Separation**

There are at least four reasons why separation from disobedient brethren is required by God. First, this type of discipline is necessary in the local church fellowship in order to maintain church purity. I Corinthians, Chapter 5 presents a case in point. That church was charged "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother (whether he is saved or not is not the issue of consideration — he bears the name "Christian") be a fornicator, or covetous ... with such an one no not to eat." Verse 11.

The individual spoken of here is disciplined by the church, and is no longer permitted to fellowship in the ongoing ministry of the local assembly. If sin is allowed to remain unconfessed and unforsaken in the Christian fellowship, its corrupting influence will affect others. Verses 5-7. God has ordained separation to stem the leavening effect of sin in compromised fellowships.

Second, separation from a disobedient brother is for his spiritual well-being. Unless the standard of God's Word is raised before the erring brother, he may continue in his sin unrebuked. II Thessalonians 3:6 commands, "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." The context reveals that laziness is not the only basis for determining disobedience.

Any believer who is unfaithful to "the tradition" (ALL the Scripture that was given to the Church) was also considered to be disobedient (cf. II Thessalonians 2:15). Disobedience to the Word of God is the determining factor. Separation will have the effect of making that brother or sister "ashamed." II Thessalonians 3:14.

That one is not an enemy, nor should he be treated as such. He is an erring brother (verse 15), and the desired result of separation is his repentance and restitution to full fellowship with the brethren. This should be the attitude of every fundamentalist -- to lovingly raise a Biblical standard by way of separation so that the erring saint will realize his disobedience, repent and return to right fellowship.

The third reason for practicing Biblical separation is the desire for a "full reward" (II John 8) at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer is "not crowned (rewarded) except he strive lawfully." II Timothy 2:5. It will be possible for a Christian to lose a reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of compromised fellowship, either directly or by identification (II John 10, 11).

Make no mistake about it, when a believer is identified with any religious activity which is not true to God's Word, he will receive the disapproval of God the Father as well. Our God is a jealous God. He wants our undivided loyalty!

He will not allow us to be identified, even in the slightest, with compromise or error. Such double-mindedness would prevent our fellowship with Him. I Corinthians 10:16-22.

Therefore, the support of a mass campaign to reach lost souls may seem most noble.

But if disobedient, new evangelical brethren are in the endeavor, the results will not justify the com promised fellowship. God will never suspend the requirement for separation in order to accomplish ANY worthwhile cause -- even evangelism. That is simply not the way God works. He always leads according to the Book.

Finally, separation from disobedient brethren is necessary in order to maintain a strong, consistent testimony in the midst of theological turmoil and confusion. COMPROMISED FELLOWSHIP CLOUDS THE ISSUES, DULLS THE SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT AND SILENCES SCRIPTURAL REPROOF! "Be not deceived, evil communications (wrong fellowships) corrupt good manners (right conduct)." I Corinthians 15:33.

Only a separated Bible believer is able, in obedience to God's clear command, to sound a faithful warning concerning the deception that Satan is sowing in the Church today (Acts 20:28-31). Always remember that our God is HOLY, and He calls us to be the same! In order to be obedient to His command, we must endeavor, by the grace of God, to be separated WHOLLY unto Him, REGARDLESS OF THE COST!



## A Fresh Look at Scriptural Baptism\_\_\_\_\_

E. L. Bynum

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*"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:13, 16, 17*

"...Keep the ordinances, as I delivered them unto you." I Corinthians 11:2.

### Is Scriptural Baptism Important?

**T**he Son of God knew it was important, for Jesus walked 60 miles to be baptized by the only man who was authorized to baptize at that time. The Holy Spirit knew it was important for he attended the baptism of Jesus. God the Father knew it was important for He sent John the Baptist to baptize, and He also voiced His approval when His only begotten Son was baptized. The Devil must think that it is important for he has tried to counterfeit it many times.

### What Is Necessary In Order To Have Scriptural Baptism?

It must be administered according to the teaching of the Bible, if it is to be scriptural baptism? Anything less than this is not true baptism, even though many might call it baptism. There are four conditions that must be met, if we are to have scriptural baptism.

**1. A SCRIPTURAL SUBJECT** — A child of God! Only those who are children of God can be baptized. A person must be saved, born again, before he can be baptized. Jesus was never lost, therefore He did not need to be saved. He was already the only begotten Son of God. All others must be saved before they can be baptized.

Scriptural baptism is believers' baptism. The lost are to be taught (discipled), then baptized. Matt. 28:19. In Acts 2:41 they received the Word, then they were baptized. In Acts 8:12, 36, 37, they believed, then they were baptized. In Acts 10:43, 44, 47, they believed, received the Holy Ghost, and then they were baptized. (Lost people do not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit). When the Philippian jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:30-34.

Paul did not tell him to be baptized to be saved! His baptism came after his believing! If water baptism cleanses us from sin, or any sin, then what does the blood of Christ cleanse us from? See I John 1:7 and Heb. 9:11, 12, 22, 25, 26. If the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, how can water baptism do any better? See Heb. 10:4.

**2. A SCRIPTURAL METHOD** — Immersion in water. Pouring and sprinkling cannot be scriptural methods, because neither one can be found in the Bible. Immersion in water is the only scriptural method of baptism. Jesus was immersed. Mark 1:9, 10; Matt. 3:13-16. John the Baptist needed "much water" for baptism. John 3:23.

Sprinkling requires little water. In Acts 8:38, 39, we are taught immersion for baptism. Baptism pictures a burial, and sprinkling could never do this. Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12. "Baptism" or "baptizo" as it is found in the Greek, means immerse, plunge, or dip. The Greek word for sprinkling is entirely different, and is never used in connection with baptism in the Bible.

**3. A SCRIPTURAL PURPOSE** — Symbolic and picture certain Bible truths. Baptism does not save, as many try to teach. Any form of doctrine that makes baptism necessary for salvation, frustrates the scriptural purpose.

Under Roman numeral II and III, we explain more fully the purpose of scriptural baptism.

**4. A SCRIPTURAL ADMINISTRATOR** — By the authority of a New Testament Baptist Church. Just anyone cannot print legal money. Just anyone cannot practice medicine as a doctor. Just anyone cannot be an undertaker. These things are regulated by the laws of man. Baptism is regulated by the laws of God. If any one of the above conditions is not met, then the baptism is not scriptural, and therefore is not really baptism at all. It may be that the administrator and the candidate for baptism may both be sincere, but sincerity is no substitute for truth.

Much dispute centers around the matter of who has the authority to administer scriptural baptism. This should not be, as a little study of the scriptures, with an open mind will clear this up. John the Baptist was the first baptizer, and he got his authority from God. John 1:6. Jesus and all twelve apostles were baptized by John. Acts 1:21, 22.

Jesus gave the apostles, who made up the first Church (I Cor. 12:28), the authority to baptize. He commissioned this same Church to baptize. Matt. 28:19. On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 who received the word were baptized, and added to the Church. Acts 2:4.

It stands to reason, that the same body they were added unto, was the one that had the authority to baptize them. Philip preached in Samaria and baptized the converts, because he was a member in good standing in the Jerusalem Church and got his authority from that Church.

Peter preached in the house of Cornelius and the whole household believed and received the Holy Ghost. But Peter did not baptize them until he got the approval of the quorum of 6 saved and baptized brethren from the Jerusalem Church that were with him. Acts 10:47; 11:12.

Paul could baptize while on his missionary journeys because he was called of the Holy Ghost to this task, but even then, he was sent out by the Church at Antioch and the Holy Ghost. Acts 13:1-4.

When Paul found disciples at Ephesus, whose baptism was unscriptural, he did not hesitate to instruct them correctly and then give them scriptural baptism. When a person finds out that their baptism was not scriptural, then they should immediately seek to be scripturally baptized.

### **I. Scriptural Baptism PLEASES The Lord**

When Jesus was baptized, God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3:17. When we follow the example of Jesus, we most certainly please the Father. Scriptural baptism is obedience to the scriptures, and obedience is better than burnt offerings and sacrifices. I Sam. 15:22; Acts 5:29. "Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized..." Acts 2:41.

Scriptural baptism is the aftereffects of soul winning, and therefore pleasing to God. Until a soul is won to Christ, there can be no baptism. The Bible says, "He that winneth souls is wise." Prov. 11:30. "And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Acts 2:41. Baptism puts people into the New Testament Church.

Scriptural baptism shows the growth of a Church, both in numbers and in maturity. A Church that is not baptizing people, has stagnated, and is not obedient to the Great Commission. The Commission is three-fold:

- (1) "Teach all nations," this is giving the gospel to all of the lost.
- (2) "Baptizing them," that is those that believe (the saved).
- (3) "Teaching them to observe all things," this the Church is to continue doing after a person has been saved and baptized.

Scriptural baptism pleases the Lord, because it recognizes the authority of the Church. Baptism can only be administered on the authority of a New Testament Church, and that authority comes directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. When He gave the Great Commission, He gave it to the Church, not to an individual. The word for "power" in Matt. 28:18, means "authority."

Scriptural baptism guarantees the continuity of a church. Through baptism, the church receives new life, new blood, and this assures its continued existence.

### **II. Scriptural Baptism PROCLAIMS The Gospel**

The purpose of baptism is not for salvation, as some suppose. Indeed, you cannot have scriptural baptism until the person to be baptized has been saved. If the candidate for baptism has not been saved when he enters the baptistry, he goes into the water a dry sinner, and comes up out of the water a wet sinner. In this case scriptural baptism has not taken place.

Baptism is a picture, type, figure and symbol of our salvation. A picture or figure is not the same as the real thing. A man does not marry the picture of his bride, but he marries the bride. The picture of the bride is fine, but what man would settle for the picture only. You do not eat the picture of a loaf of bread, but you eat the bread.

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." I Peter 3:21.

The above scripture plainly tells us that baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh. It is only a figure, picture, or symbol of that salvation. To contend that the figure or picture is the same as the real thing is foolish indeed. "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, WHO is the FIGURE of HIM that was to come." Rom. 5:14.

This scripture tells us that Adam was a figure of Christ. No one would argue that Adam was Christ. No, he was only a figure, or picture of Christ.

"Water baptism is the outward testimony of the believer's inward faith. The person is saved the moment he places his faith in the Lord Jesus. Water baptism is his visible testimony of his faith and the salvation he was given in answer to that faith." —Wuest.

We hasten to add, if that "inward faith" did not exist, then the baptism was not scriptural baptism; because an unsaved person cannot receive scriptural baptism.

Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." Col. 2:12.

Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS the death of our old life to sin; the burial therein; and the resurrection to walk in newness of life. "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. 6:4.

Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS our faith in the Triune God. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matt. 28:19.

Scriptural baptism PICTURES and PROCLAIMS our putting on of Christ, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Gal. 3:26,27.

### **III. Scriptural Baptism PROTECTS The Church**

In many ways, scriptural baptism is a shield of protection to the church. Many have not considered it from this standpoint.

#### **Scriptural Baptism Protects The Church From Doctrinal Error**

→ **Scriptural baptism protects the church from the false doctrine of "baptismal regeneration."**

In the 2nd century, some of the churches began to teach that baptism was necessary for salvation. In the 1st century Paul had dealt with those who taught that you had to be circumcised and keep the law, to be saved. He repudiated that doctrine.

Even so, those preachers and churches who were sound in the faith, during the 2nd century, repudiated baptismal regeneration. However, large numbers continued baptizing for the wrong purpose. This eventually led to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church.

Scriptural baptism protects the church from the false doctrine of "infant baptism."

Those who were teaching baptismal regeneration (salvation by baptism), decided that if baptism was so important, then the sooner it could be performed, the better. This led to infant baptism. At first the infants were immersed, for until this time immersion was the only method of baptism known.

→ **Scriptural baptism protects the church from the false method of "sprinkling" for baptism.**

The churches who believed in "baptismal regeneration and infant baptism," changed the method of baptism from immersion to pouring, and then later on to sprinkling. By the 4th century, Constantine had formed the Roman Catholic Church, and in 416 A.D., infant baptism was established by law. The Protestants who teach baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, and sprinkling, are merely following the example of the Roman Catholic Church.

The three doctrinal errors listed above, violate the first three requirements for scriptural baptism:

- (1) Baptismal regeneration requires sinners to be baptized. Scriptural baptism requires the saved to be baptized.
- (2) Sprinkling requires little water, while scriptural baptism requires "much water." John 3:23.
- (3) Infant baptism requires little infants who are unable to hear and believe to be baptized, but scriptural baptism requires that believers only be baptized.

→ **Scriptural Baptism protects the church from Protestant denominationalism**

Since Protestant denominations came out of the Roman Catholic Church, it is not surprising that all of them contend for one or more of the above doctrinal errors. The Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists all sprinkle infants, and all believe in some form of baptismal regeneration. All other Protestant denominations are either branches off of the Roman Catholic Church, or one of the above Protestant denominations, and/or accept the baptism of them.

Baptists are not Protestants, but have existed in every century since the 1st century. They have existed under different names such as: Christians, Montanists, Donatists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Anabaptists and Baptists. (A rose by any other name smells the same.)

Baptists cannot accept the baptism of churches that are wrong on the matter of salvation. This is one doctrine that is vital to the Christian faith. Although it is not generally known, the Protestant denominations do teach baptismal regeneration, as the following notes from, *The Church that Jesus Built*, by Roy Mason, clearly show:

"The Episcopal Catechism says: "Baptism is that wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God...'

"The Presbyterian Confession reads: "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and a seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins..'

"The Methodist ritual reads as follows: "Sanctify this water for His holy sacrament and grant that this child, now to be baptized, may receive the fullness of Thy grace, and ever remain in the number of Thy faithful and elect children."

"The Methodist articles were based on those of the English Church (Episcopalian). Concerning the articles of the English Church, to which he belonged, we find John Wesley writing as follows (*Sermons*, London, 1872, Vol. 2, sermon 46, p. 74): 'It is certain our church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again; and it is allowed that the whole office of the baptism of infants proceeds on this supposition."

"Again, let us examine the Lutheran view. This is expressed by the founder in the Augsburg Confession as follows: 'Concerning baptism, they teach that it is necessary to salvation... and condemn the Anabaptists, who hold . that infants can be saved without it.' (Neander, *History of Christian Dogmas*, Vol. 2, p. 693)."

→ **Scriptural baptism protects the church from Interdenominationalism**

While there are many different forms of Interdenominationalism and Nondenominationalism, our experience has been that none of these groups hold the line on baptism and the Lord's Supper. All of them, as far as we know, will accept people into their membership who have been immersed (regardless of who did the immersing), as long as the member is satisfied with his baptism. Unfortunately there is a growing number of Baptist (so-called), who take this position.

We say that such Baptists should take down their sign, and call themselves Interdenominational, for that is all they are. We believe that when a Church is wrong on salvation and/or baptism, it is not a scriptural Church, regardless of the name.

Many Interdenominational churches will accept into their membership those who have been sprinkled, or even have received no form of water baptism at all. How sad to see people take this position and yet contend that they believe the Bible.

→ **Scriptural baptism protects the church from the ecumenical One World Church**

No Baptist Church that holds the line on SCRIPTURAL baptism can ever be a part of the Ecumenical movement and the coming World Church. Scriptural baptism stands as an impassable barrier and an unbridgeable gap between sound Baptist Churches and the Ecumenical movement. As long as we will not accept the baptism of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, we cannot ecumenicalize with them. (This is not the only reason why we should not, but it stands as a barrier so that we cannot.)

Already the Catholics and some Protestant denominations have united some of their schools, so that theological students from various denominations are studying in the same school. Steps have already been taken by some denominations to accept the ordinations of ministers from other denominations. A number of denominations have merged, and the Harlot Church of Revelation 17 is being formed.

→ **Baptists who accept alien immersion are helping to pave the way for the ecumenical One World Church**

This is a serious statement, but we are willing to stand upon it. Any Baptist Church that accepts the baptism of the Protestant Churches, is preparing the way for joining the Ecumenical Church at a later date. If their baptism is valid, then why not join them? But Protestant baptism is not valid, because they do not have scriptural authority, nor do they baptize the right people for the right reason or purpose.

How can scriptural Baptists fellowship with, cooperate with, or receive baptism from churches that are Baptist in name, but who receive baptism from every denominational Tom, Dick and Harry that comes along. Baptism does not hinge upon whether the person is satisfied with it, but the question is, is the Lord satisfied with it? Does it meet the teaching of the Scriptures?

We know some preachers and Baptist Churches, that seem to be sound on baptism as far as the local congregation is concerned. However, these same preachers and Churches do not seem to be embarrassed as they work together with "alien immersion Baptists."

These preachers with diverse positions on baptism, swap pulpits for revivals, Bible conferences, etc. They also work together in sending out missionaries, both "board" and "independent" in method. They work together in building schools for the training of preachers.

What they will be able to teach in the schools on baptism and church truth, remains a mystery to me. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3.

"Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.?" I Cor. 5:6.

Lest some reader should misunderstand, we do not doubt that there are many saved people among the Protestants and Interdenominationalism. Salvation is of the Lord and is by grace. A person can be saved and be a member of any church or no church. (We do not mean that by so doing, that the saved person is pleasing to the Lord in all things.

For it is at this point that the problem arises.) Salvation is of the Lord, but baptism must be administered by man. But if that man does not have the Bible authority to baptize, then his baptism is no more authentic, real, or scriptural, than some false brand of salvation.

We contend that this authority rests in a scriptural New Testament Church, and we have never seen a Church that could meet that test, other than some Baptist Churches.



## Communion: Open? Close? Closed? \_\_\_\_\_

**Don E. McFarland**

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**A**s stated in the title, there are the three basic views of communion which are generally embraced among Baptists and Protestants alike. But which is correct? Since all differ from one another, they cannot all be right.

But, before we go any further, we must agree upon "Who" or "What" will determine a correct or an incorrect position on this subject. And, also, "Who" or "What" will be the final authority governing what we believe about this ordinance.

The Bible must be our Final Authority on this subject, (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Now, let us briefly examine these three positions to see which of them most closely adheres to the Bible pattern.

**OPEN COMMUNION** (The Interdenominational Way)

The basic position of those who hold to open communion is two-fold:

→ **The Supper is open to all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth.**

Question: Who should determine who loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth, the prospective participant, or the church to whom the Lord Jesus has entrusted this ordinance?

→ **Since it is the Lord's Supper, no church has the right to prohibit anyone from partaking.**

Question: Is the Lord's Supper a Christian ordinance or a church ordinance?

- If it is a Christian ordinance then every Christian has a right to partake of it when and where he may choose.

- If it is a Christian ordinance, then is baptism also a Christian ordinance, or are they both church ordinances?
- If these are both church ordinances then the observing church has Christ's authority to govern them.

### **CLOSE COMMUNION** (The Denominational Way)

Those who hold to close communion are opposed to both open and closed communion.

These are "Middle Ground" Christians.

Their position is also two-fold:

- **All of the same "faith"(of the same denomination) are free to observe the Supper with any church in their denomination.**
- **Membership in their denomination is the determining factor as to who can and who cannot observe the Supper with them.**

Question: Where is denominationalism found in the Bible? If it can be found in the Bible then close communion is the correct way, and both open and closed communions are wrong.

Question: Which term is used most often in the New Testament: "denomination" or "church"?

- The word "church" is used 76 times and "churches" (plural) 37 times in the New Testament with not one hint of denominational association among them.
- The teaching or principle of denominationalism cannot be found in the New Testament.
- Denominationalism is a man-conceived and man-promoted idea.
- There is no such thing as "The Baptist Church" or "The Baptist Denomination" taught in the New Testament-both are unscriptural terms.

### **CLOSED COMMUNION** (The Bible Way)

That closed communion is Scriptural may be proven using the following arguments:

- **Its Institution Acclaims It**

It is my firm conviction Jesus instituted the Supper as a closed ordinance since all the church was not allowed to observe it that first time. Acts 1:15 reveals the membership of the Jerusalem church at that time: "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty)."

But, how many were in attendance when the Lord instituted His Supper? There were only eleven. Where were the rest of those 120 members? They were observing the Passover with their families in obedience to the Word of God. Jesus had not invited them to be with Him and the apostles when He instituted the Supper. Therefore it began as a closed ordinance.

→ **It Was Closed To Unbelievers When It Was Instituted**

Mark 14:18-20 says, "And as they sat and did eat,(the Passover) Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with Me in the dish."

When we compare this passage with John 13:27-30 we can see exactly when Judas left this group to betray the Lord. "And after the sop (the Passover sop, 'he that dippeth with Me in the dish') Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the hag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop (Passover sop) went immediately out: and it was night."

Judas left the group as they were observing the Passover and the Lord waited for him to leave before He instituted His Supper.

Thus, in its institution the Supper was closed to unbelievers.

Question: If the Supper is open to all, how would the observing church know whether the visitors in their midst were genuine believers?

- Without doubt, Judas had also claimed to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth.
- One thing is for sure. The Supper was instituted with only saved, faithful church members present.

→ **Church Discipline Demands It**

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul first introduced his teaching on the Lord's Supper in chapter five and then concluded it in chapter eleven. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (I Cor. 5:11).

This command to not eat the Lord's Supper with ungodly people was given to a local church. And, the Supper is to be observed only in a local church.

This command also requires the local church to judge and to exercise authority over all with whom they observe the Supper.

It is unlikely and improbable that those who observe open or close communion will obey this command.

Question: If a stranger came into their midst who claimed to love the Lord Jesus or who was a member of a Baptist Church in a distant city, how could they know whether this person was a godly Christian? And, if they let this person eat with them, could they be sure they were obeying this command governing the Table?

- To disobey the Scriptures is a sin. The only way a church can be reasonably sure it is obeying the Word of God in regards to communion is to practice closed communion.

→ **New Testament Practice Confirms It**

One of the questions often asked by those who practice open and close communion is, "What about the apostle Paul, didn't he observe the Supper with the churches he ministered to?" The answer is a simple and straightforward, "NO."

"But what about Acts 20:7 when he 'came to Troas'? Wasn't he observing the Supper with the church in that city?"  
The answer is the same, "NO."

Question: What does this verse actually say? "And upon the first day of the week, (Sunday) when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight."

After midnight a man sitting in the balcony went to sleep and fell out a window and appeared to be dead. Paul ministered to him and revived him, and then in verse eleven we are told, "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed."

If breaking bread in verse seven means to observe the Lord's Supper, then so does it also in verse eleven. If this is so, then Paul and the church observed the Supper on Sunday and then again on Monday.

They were not observing the Supper because there was no cup mentioned in either instance. The Lord's Supper requires both the bread and the cup.

- "Breaking bread" was a term used when sitting down to a common meal. This term is still in use today.
- There is no proof in the New Testament that Paul ever observed communion with any church.
- If this cannot be proven then open or close communion cannot be proven as a New Testament practice.

**Question: Which of these three practices, open - close - closed, most closely follows Biblical teaching and pattern?**

- From a careful examination of the Scriptures, it is evident that **closed communion** most closely adheres to the Biblical pattern.

