

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

"...Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body." - Ephesians 5:23

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MADE ALIVE WITH JESUS

by Owen D. Olbricht

Colossians 2:11-13 is a passage of significance relative to baptism. Because of different attitudes toward baptism, interpretations of these verses differ widely. Some of the major ones are as follows:

Paul is not alluding to water baptism. Some conclude Paul is speaking about a spiritual act, a baptism of the Spirit, because he stated that it is "a circumcision made without hands" (Colossians 2:11). "[I]t probably contains a reference to conversion ('you were circumcised,' aorist tense), the circumcision of the heart wrought by the Spirit referred to elsewhere by Paul (Rom. 2:28-29; 2 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 3:3; also *Odes of Solomon* 11:2; *Gospel of Thomas*)" [James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 156].

This interpretation is sometimes given to avoid the conclusion that water baptism is for the forgiveness of sins.

The problem with this conclusion is that even though circumcision made by God's active power is spiritual, faith and baptism are man's part, as is stated in the verse 12. Albrecht Oepke correctly observed: "New Testament references to baptism should be thought of as water baptism unless the context indicates otherwise. **Baptism** means technically 'to baptize in water.' Hence it is unnecessary to specify a medium" [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, 1:539)].

Paul is referring to symbolic instead of actual results of water baptism. This conclusion is drawn because of a belief that Paul is using symbolism in his reference to "circumcision," "buried," and "raised" (Colossians 2:11-13). If other Bible passages only considered baptism as symbolically associated with salvation, then such a conclusion might have some justification; however, other passages do not hint of symbolism in reference to baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:38-39; 22:16).

Paul is saying that the same power of God that raised Jesus puts faith in the heart of those who are baptized.

"Faith in God's mighty operation in raising again Jesus, is saving faith (Rom. 4:24; 10:9); and it is wrought in the soul by His same 'mighty working' whereby He 'raised Jesus from the dead' (Eph. 1:19, 20)." [Jamison, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 1321].

God's putting faith in one's heart is what the denominational creeds teach, but it is not a biblical statement. Instead, the Bible teaches that faith comes through reading and hearing God's word (John 17:20; 20:30, 31; Acts 17:11, 12; Rom. 10:17).

Paul is referring to a literal water baptism based solely on a faith in Jesus' resurrection. "[I]t is man's belief in God's having operated or worked to raise Jesus from the dead that gives baptism its significance" [Jimmy Allen, *Re-baptism* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Pub., 1991), 156]. Those who teach this usually believe that baptism is valid because one is acting to obey God without necessarily understanding or believing that God is acting to remove his sins. Faith in the resurrection is necessary but this is not Paul's main point in this passage.

Paul is referring to water baptism in which the one being baptized is being forgiven because of faith in the working of God, the same working that raised Jesus from the dead. This is consistent with the context and is clearly stated by many commentaries:

"It is 'through faith in the working of God' (RV) that meaning and validity can be given to the rite" [J. Ithel Jones, *The New Bible Commentary*, F. Davidson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 1048].

"'He raised you up, as it were, along with Christ. This happened as a result of your faith in God's power'" [Robert Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Translators Handbook on Colossians and Philemon* (London: United Bible Societies, 1977), 58].

"[T]hrough the faith of the operation of God, not the faith which God works, but your faith in God's working: faith in God's energy as displayed in Christ's resurrection" [Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 3:484].

"The resurrection of Christ is presented by Paul as the supreme manifestation of the power of God. Those who have been raised with Christ have been raised through faith in the divine power which brought Christ back from the dead" [F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, "Ephesians and Colossians" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 236].

"It could only happen when a man believed in the effective working of God which had raised Jesus Christ from the dead and could do the same for him" [William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and the Thessalonians*, The Daily Bible Study Series, rev. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 140].

G. R. Beasley-Murray makes the following comments relative to Colossians 2:12: "The divine and human aspects of the experience of salvation are accorded full recognition. Not that faith effects its own resurrection; faith rejoices in the grace revealed in Christ and directs itself wholly to the God whose almighty power raised Christ from the dead and raises helpless sinners." Moffat's translation is quoted evidently with approval, "You were buried with Him in your baptism and thereby raised with Him as you believed in the power of the God who raised Him from the dead" [*Baptism In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 154].

"It is wrong to represent the function of faith as merely that of asking for baptism in which God works irrespective of man's attitude, or of understanding what God does in baptism, or of evidencing an intention of making the appropriate response after baptism" (ibid., 273).

"...God acts in His almighty power to raise the dead in baptism in response to the faith of the baptized. A baptism wherein God raises from death apart from the active faith of the object of His action is not contemplated" (ibid., 364).

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)

"The mighty working of God as already demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ is thus the object of the believer's confidence. The argument would then be as follows: They had accepted the fact of Christ's resurrection. This was the signal demonstration of the power of God, and in reliance upon that power they had known a spiritual resurrection in union with Christ" [Herbert M. Carson, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 66-67].

A better statement of this passage could not be made than the last quoted exposition. Paul's message is that in baptism one is spiritually circumcised and made spiritually alive by God because in baptism he has faith that God can accomplish this, which faith is in God's activity, the same working that raised Jesus. He believes this is done without human hands, by God Himself. It is not faith in the preacher, the water, one's self, or one's own acts (or anything else he does physically). He receives this benefit because of faith in what God is doing, faith in that same working of God, that same divine activity, that raised Jesus.

If one can have faith that God so worked as to put new life in Jesus' dead body, surely he can have a solid basis for faith that God can give him spiritual life be-

cause he is buried and raised with Jesus in baptism. The one who is so co-buried and co-raised is also co-made alive with Jesus. He can have faith that because the power of God's mighty work raised Jesus, God can also put spiritual life into him and spiritually circumcise him by removing his old life and forgiving his sins.

The validity of the act is dependent on faith in what God is doing. **The act by itself does not spiritually circumcise one or make one alive with Jesus.** Faith in God's working, apparent in His raising Jesus, is what causes God to act in the life of the one being baptized. The physical act without faith in what God is doing is simply an empty, valueless ritual.

In order to have faith in the working of God, one must understand what God is doing when he is being baptized. God is removing his sins and sinful physical approach to life, and making him spiritually alive. This is all because he has faith that God can and will do this.

We can conclude from this passage that Paul makes faith in God's working the basis for God's acting when one is being baptized, and that baptism has no innate ability to bring about such effects. Baptism to Paul is the moment in which God acts because a person finds in Jesus' resurrection adequate evidence to believe that God can also work to resurrect him to a new life and remove his sinful past. Based on Jesus' resurrection he can have faith God will powerfully work in his life as he submits to Jesus by being baptized.

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Editor's Note: I realize that frequent lessons on the manner, meaning and purpose of baptism will draw some criticism from some of our readers who do not understand the necessity of baptism in God's plan of salvation. However, lessons such as the one above are greatly needed. It is precisely because much of the religious world denies the essentiality of baptism that such articles are written, with the hope that these lessons will lead others to see the truth. Many who "say" baptism is important deny it is essential or that one must have a clear understanding of why the Scriptures say we must be baptized. We cannot force people to believe these things. All we can do is to repeatedly teach what the Bible says about these matters and pray that good and honest hearts will heed what the Bible says, not what is popular or what is taught in creedbooks of the denominations. Brother Olbricht has written an excellent study on the purpose of baptism, entitled, **Baptism: New Birth or Empty Ritual**. I have read a great many books on the subject of baptism, and I can say without any hesitation that this is the finest book available on the purpose of being baptized! You can order the book from the author for \$7.00, plus postage. His address is at the conclusion of his article. You will benefit greatly from this book on this vital Bible topic.

CONFRONTATION BETWEEN A PROVOKER AND A PROPHET

"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" 1 Kings 18:17-18.

During the Bible period of the divided kingdom we see that all of the kings in the Northern Kingdom, Israel, were wicked. King Ahab, the seventh king to reign in the Northern Kingdom was the most wicked. **"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him"** (1 Kings 16:30). In 1 Kings 16:33 it was said of him that he **"...did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."**

In Kings 18:27, King Ahab, the provoker of God, confronts Elijah, the prophet of God. In this confrontation, the provoker of God made a charge against the prophet of God, **"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"** He accuses Elijah of bringing trouble to Israel. Ahab thought that Elijah was nothing but a troublemaker. Just because one is accused of causing trouble doesn't mean that it is true. And it certainly was not true in this case. Have you ever been charged with causing trouble in the church?

When we look at some of the things happening in the church today, who is the cause of the trouble? Unbelievable as it may sound, the faithful child of God as he declares, demonstrates and defends the Truth is charged by some as being the "troublemaker." Let's see who the real troublemaker is:

WHO IS THE TROUBLEMAKER IN THE CHURCH

- (1) It is the one who **CONFORMS** to false doctrine, not the one who **CEASES** it (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:19-23).
- (2) It is the one who **COMMENDS** false doctrine, not the one who **CONDEMNS** it (Ephesians 6:10-17).
- (3) It is the one who **CONDONES** false doctrine, not the one who **CRIES OUT** against it (Acts 20:27-31).
- (4) It is the one who **CONTINUES** in false doctrine, not the one who **COMES OUT** of it (Romans 12:21).
- (5) It is the one who **COVERS UP** false doctrine, not the one who **CORRECTS** it (2 Timothy 4:2-4).
- (6) It is the one who **COMPLIMENTS** false doctrine, not the one who **CENSURES** it (Titus 1:9-11).

(7) It is the one who is **CONTENT** in false doctrine, not the one who **CONTENDS** against it (Jude 3).

(8) It is the one who **CONTRIBUTES** to false doctrine, not the one who **CON-FUTES** it (Ephesians 5:11).

(9) It is the one who **CHEERS** false teachers, not the one who **CHECKS OUT** false teachers (1 John 4:1).

(10) It is the one who **CHOOSES** to sit at the feet of false teachers, not the one who **CALLS** the names of false teachers (II Timothy 2:17-18).

(11) It is the one who **COMFORTS** the false teacher, not the one who **CAUTIONS** others about the false teacher (Matthew 7:15).

(12) It is the one who **CALLS** the false teacher sound, not the one who **CALLS** upon the false teacher to speak whereof he stands (I Peter 3:15).

Following the charge by Ahab, Elijah the prophet corrected Ahab, the provoker. *"And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim"* (I Kings 18:18). People who make false charges need to be corrected. When people make false charges against Christ, his commands or his church we must correct them by *"speaking the truth in love"* (Ephesians 4:15). We must stand ready always to *"speak as the oracles of God"* (I Peter 4:11). We must be *"ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (I Peter 3:15).

Elijah correctly directed Ahab to the real cause of the trouble in Israel. They had ceased following God's Word and had commenced following godless ways. When we turn from God's way, trouble will always be there because we will be in that godless way.

Whenever we are confronted about spiritual things let us have the courage to do what the Bible commands and to call upon others to do the same. Let us be careful and cautious lest we become "trouble" in God's sight.

— Jerry W. Joseph

There are a lot of old and strange gods waiting in the shadows of our lives in search of new subjects. They leave only when the true and living God is given the place of prominence in our hearts.

More time in God's house will bring about better times in our house.

GUIDELINES FOR BIBLE CLASS TEACHERS

by Lou Hale

This material is sent forth with conviction that if learned and applied will make all teachers and prospective teachers aware of the importance of proper preparation to teach a Bible class. There are at least four areas of preparation that must be considered.

The first one is **character**. We make specific reference to credibility. Jesus said, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). This is one of the strongest lessons that people learn about us. We should make periodic self evaluations by asking ourselves, "Am I capable of teaching a Bible class? Am I trusted by others for their spiritual needs? Do I see myself as being praiseworthy? How do others see my credibility?" These questions must receive a positive reply before an individual will become an effective teacher. The other part of the character that we must deal with is **integrity**. This is produced by our words becoming a reality, or to say the same thing in another way, we must walk our talk (Matthew 7:21).

The second thing that we want to discuss in our preparation is **knowledge**, specifically Biblical knowledge. The greatest expectation that God has of me, and of all His followers, is to know and adhere to His word. This brings about development in the individual, and development is a must in order for one to be an effective teacher (Hebrews 5:12-13; II Timothy 3:16-17). Furthermore, development equips us with the ability to arouse and influence the minds of those who are taught. It provides the ability to make good, positive, long lasting deposits in their minds that will last and be used for a lifetime.

The third part is the **proper relationship with others**. Teachers must be able to recognize and deal with the emotional needs of those whom they teach. This involves feelings and associations. Study Acts 2 and see how their emotional needs were fulfilled. In society today people have the same emotional needs and are crying out for help. As Bible class teachers we must supply them with the Biblical teaching to meet their needs. Teachers do this by developing communication skills, recognizing indicators, and practicing empathetic listening. Practicing these characteristics will bring about love and trust between the teacher and the stu-

dents, which is a foundation for a good relationship.

The fourth area of preparation is the **ability to present a logical lesson**. Logic is important for many reasons. Without it there is no proper **reasoning**. The Scriptures teach us to reason together. As teachers we must produce and deliver the material logically, in order for the student to follow and make application. Reason brings forth all the important factors of visualization. If the students cannot visualize themselves as being part of the lesson that is being presented, they will not and **cannot** make a response. Presenting material logically is an **absolute** factor for our success as a Bible class teacher.

Finally, in closing, a word of caution: do not become wrapped up in your own ideas and opinions. Make sure that what you present in your teaching is the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Be genuine in what you are teaching and make sure that you are a product of it. This is an incentive to those who hear to become a follower. When we put it all together – character, knowledge, relationship, and logic – we see the type of teacher that Jesus was and the importance of our preparation.

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1).

Now one can see the importance of the proper preparation before one attempts to teach a Bible class. I hope this will help all of us who teach to become better teachers, and those who are anticipating teaching to start now preparing for the time when you will be called upon to teach a Bible class.

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BEAT A CHARGE THEN!

School boys and girls have heard the story of Napoleon. Apparently defeated after one of his great battles, he called a drummer boy to him and commanded him to beat a retreat. The boy looking for a moment at the retreating army, answered, "Sire, marshal never taught me to do a retreat, but I can beat a charge gloriously." "Beat a charge, then," was Napoleon's stern command. When the battle was over, defeat had been turned into victory all because the drummer boy did not know how to beat a retreat.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Far better for us if we never learn how to beat a retreat from the battles of life. Many people are defeated only because they have contemplated defeat—they have planned nothing else. Let us plan an aggressive warfare and enter the battle expecting nothing but victory. Learn to beat a retreat, and you will beat a retreat. Learn only to beat a charge and you will beat a charge that ends in triumph. We do those things in life which we have learned to do.

—Selected

TAKE A STAND NOW!

by David Macy

I firmly believe we are in one of the most critical periods of our entire history as a nation! The forces of good and evil, right and wrong, are on the battlefield, and their swords are becoming more and more unsheathed each day and glinting in the bright sunshine for all to see. The time to take a stand for the right and truth is not somewhere off in the distant future, it is right now while we still have time and opportunity because I also firmly believe that if we do not take a stand now, the opportunity will soon be gone, possibly forever—as far as we are concerned.

Like Delilah told Samson when he was bound with strong, new cords, "The Philistines are upon you." The forces of evil are not just approaching, they are upon us right now, even at our door. What are we going to do about it? Will you say like Joshua of old, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:14-15)? Or will you lie down and let the enemy conquer without even a fight? "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:10-17).

Power thought for your life: It is not time to be silent and passive. It is time to speak the truth in love with all boldness and get in the arena with Satan at every opportunity that we might engage him in battle, knowing God will give us the victory because we are girded with the full dress Christian armour, and we are fighting under the blood-stained banner of the King of kings and Lord of lords. "Onward Christian soldiers." The time for battle is now, and remember as you stand and fight, your hand will always be in the hand of the one who walked on the water and stilled the raging seas with the words "peace, be still." The only way we can lose is not to stand and not to fight right now!

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GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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