

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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“ONCE FOR ALL”

PART THREE

by Lee Moses

“Once for all” is a term and concept that arises several times in Scripture. Such occurrences teach us about the sufficiency of God’s work, and about our appropriate response considering that sufficiency. The January and February issues of the *Fulton County Gospel News* have contemplated the “once-for-allness” of the earthly appearance of Christ, man’s physical death, the sacrifice of Christ, and Christ’s Second Coming, all discussed in Hebrews 9:26-28. This month, we will examine one more “once for all” work of God, and consider something set in contrast to God’s all-sufficient work.

The Revelation of “the Faith”

While the focus of our study of “once for all” has been in Hebrews 9:26-28, there is a “once for all” event not discussed in this particular passage that we would be negligent to omit. Jude, the fleshly and spiritual brother of our Lord, wrote, “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was **once** [‘once for all,’ American Standard Version] delivered unto the saints*” (verse 3, all emphases LM). “The faith” refers to the **system** of faith, the Gospel of Christ, His objective word that produces personal faith and calls for continued obedience (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:17; Galatians 1:23; 3:23; 1 Timothy 4:1). So the Gospel, Jesus Christ’s system of faith, has been delivered “once for all.” No additional teachings can produce Biblical faith or rightly serve as a Divine call to obedience.

This comports with the promise that Jesus gave to His apostles: “*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things*

to come” (John 16:12-13). When Jesus made this statement, the faith had **not** been “once for all delivered”—He had “yet many things to say unto” His apostles. **Some** of the faith had been delivered, but not **all**. However, the Holy Spirit would come to guide the apostles into all truth. If the apostles were to be guided into all truth, all truth would have to be delivered before the apostles died. And it was. This is why the apostle Peter could exclaim, “[*Christ’s*] *divine power hath given unto us **all** things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*” (2 Peter 1:3). This is why Jude could speak of “*the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints.*”

This means that there is no additional revelation yet to be delivered to the saints, God’s people. When a trucking company has delivered an entire shipment “once for all,” the warehouse that received it should not expect additional pieces of that same shipment to arrive in the coming days. Similarly, one should not expect continued revelation from God when He said it had already been “once for all delivered” over 1900 years ago. To expect such is distrustful, and to profess to receive such is blasphemous.

Yet many both expect and profess to receive continued revelation. Muslims claim that Mohammed, the founder of their religion, received several Divine revelations. These supposed revelations form the basis of Islam. Mohammed claimed to receive the first of these from the angel Gabriel in a cave near Mecca in the year A.D. 610.¹ This was over **five hundred years** after the conclusion of the timeframe in which Jesus had promised to reveal all truth, the death of the last apostle (John 16:13). Mohammed attempted to apply Old Testament prophecies about Christ to himself. Mohammed attempted to make Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth apply to

himself. Mohammed attempted to portray himself as the last and greatest prophet. However, the book that God actually inspired informs us, “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, **hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds***” (Hebrews 1:1-2). God ceased spreading out inspired revelation over the centuries. He ceased speaking through numerous prophets under various commissions.

The consideration of these contrasts places the relation of Christianity to all that had gone before in a clear light. That which is communicated in parts, sections, fragments, must of necessity be imperfect; and so also a representation which is made in many modes cannot be other than provisional...But the Revelation in Christ, the Son, is perfect both in substance and in form.²

Mohammed and his adherents would have men to believe that God abandoned that which He acknowledged as perfect and final, once again to issue a far-flung prophecy and commission. The faith had already been “once for all delivered”—thus, Mohammed is a **false** prophet.

Similar things could be said about Joseph Smith and his alleged revelation from the angel “Moroni.” [See the article “Contradictions in the Book of Mormon” in last month’s *FCGN* for a fuller discussion.]

The Roman Catholic Church has repeatedly and adamantly denied the finality, authority, and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. They have held councils and issued papal bulls over the centuries that profess to add new revelation to the word of God. The Council of Trent, held in the sixteenth century, decreed that such tradition is of equal authority with Scripture. Beyond this, they decreed that the authoritative interpretation of Scripture was to be given by the

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Roman Catholic Church, and their interpretation was always given in light of the aforementioned tradition.

As such, the tradition is actually of far **greater** weight to the Roman Catholic Church than is Scripture. *“Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition”* (Matthew 15:6).

While the Protestant denominations were formed to “protest” these and other Catholic abuses of power, they have not fared much better. Their creeds, denominational organizations, and synods presume to legislate spiritually in addition to the word of God. Jude was inspired to write of *“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* The word for “once” “pertains to a single occurrence and decisively unique.”³

Yet the existence of and reworking of creeds, and the decrees of synods and denominational organizations, might cause one to think that the faith was yet in the process of being perfected, and that God required Protestant denominations to accomplish it.

Pentecostals insist that modern-day Christians are directly led by the Holy Spirit into receiving new revelation. There are those in other denominations, and even some within the Lord’s church, who claim to receive

“direct leading by the Holy Spirit.” This would also amount to new revelation, were it true, for whatever “leading” the Holy Spirit might give would be a revelation from God. The thought of new revelation from God excites many, just as those at Mars’ Hill in Athens *“spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing”* (Acts 17:21). However, there is no new revelation—as it has been aptly put, “All that is old may not be gold, but if it is new, it cannot be true!” God’s revelation has been written (Ephesians 3:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 5:12; 2 Peter 3:1-2; Revelation 1:1-3), and it has been completed.

God has completed His book, and no additions or subtractions are authorized. And those who attempt such will be severely punished: *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”* (Revelation 22:18-19). While this warning is particularly against adding to or taking from the contents of the book of Revelation, it connects with other similar warnings (such as Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6) against “adding to or taking from” **any** of the contents of Scripture. And it is striking that such a warning comes at the close of the last book of Scripture to be inspired and written. “This language can scarcely signify anything other than a closed canon.”⁴

While we have considered several things that are “once for all,” let us also consider something that is **not**.

Christianity is Not a “Once for All” Religion

Some make the claim that one’s being set right with God is likewise “once for all.” People will throw around slogans such as “once saved, always saved.” However, nothing could be further from the truth.⁵

Often, the Bible contrasts the “once-for-allness” of God’s work with the Christian’s need for diligence and perseverance. The Hebrews writer focused on the all-sufficiency of the one-time sacrifice of Jesus and the one-time offering of His blood (9:25-28; 10:10-14). This is how it is for God—He does not have to repeat an act to accomplish His

intention.⁶ But the human side is very different. This was true for priests serving under the Law of Moses—their work never fully atoned for sin (9:25; 10:1-4). Neither is the Christian’s response to God’s work a one-time event.

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience [‘endurance,’ New King James Version], that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. . . . Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:35-38).

“Patience” or “endurance” (verse 36) implies continuous exertion, whereas “draw[ing] back” as losing the favor of God (verse 38) is presented as the alternative.

Paul wrote, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”* (Romans 12:1). While Christ only offered Himself once, we are to remain **continuously** offered before God. A “living sacrifice” must ever remain a sacrifice.

Likewise, as Jude spoke of *“the faith which was once delivered [by God] unto the saints,”* he went on to remind readers that *“the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not”* (verse 5). Jude used other examples of those who failed to keep themselves in God’s grace, even though they had received it. Toward the close of the epistle, Jude reminds readers, *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (Jude 21).

To speak of a man’s doing one time what is necessary for salvation as similarly “once for all” as the work of God is false and presumptuous. It diminishes God’s transcendence over man. It places undue confidence in human accomplishment. What God does pertaining to man’s salvation is indeed “once for all”—what man does is not.

Conclusion

There are things we might accomplish in life that we think of as being “once for all”—perhaps we might kick a bad habit or learn a new skill. But when God has stepped into man’s history to effect man’s salvation, we see

unique events in all of history that undeniably accomplished what God intended them to accomplish, and what man could **not** accomplish of himself. From each of them we learn something about the sufficiency of God's work. From each of them we learn something about the falsehood and futility of several manmade religious doctrines. And from each of them we learn something about our proper attitude and response toward the "once for all" work of God.

¹ Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002 printing), 4:164.

² Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: MacMillan, 1892), p. 4.

³ *Hapax*, in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), p.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1988), p. 23.

⁵ There is a sense in which one's relationship with God is forever changed once he obeys the Gospel, although that change in relationship does not ensure continued salvation, fellowship with God, or hope of eternal life. But the change binds the Christian to a **second** law of pardon (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Baptism into Christ is an action that can never be repeated. The Hebrews' writer speaks of those who have

obeyed the Gospel as "*those who were once enlightened*" (Hebrews 6:4). There is indeed a certain "once-for-allness of the one baptism," as described by Gustav Stählin (*Hapax, ephapax*, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 printing, 1:382). However, Mr. Stählin takes this concept too far, effectively teaching that Christianity is a "once for all" religion, contradicting the numerous Scriptures teaching the need of a Christian's continuous effort in perseverance. Although a Christian may not need to be baptized again, he will need to do something to obtain pardon.

⁶ The sufficiency of God's work does not negate the fact that He continues to be active in providence.

CHURCHES DISPLEASED WITH GOD

By Marvin L. Weir

To be displeased with God is evil and sinful, and yet this number grows larger every year. The Old Testament character, Naaman, has often been referenced to represent people who trust more in their own thoughts than in God's thoughts. Naaman was a great and honorable man, but he had the dreaded disease of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1). Elisha, prophet of God, sent word to Naaman with instructions for the cure of his leprosy (verse 10). The remedy was clear and easy to understand. The message from God: "*Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.*" Naaman was displeased both with the messenger sent by the prophet and the method of the cure. Instead of obeying God's instructions, Naaman gave his opinion as to **how** and **where** the healing should take place. The text reads, "*But Naaman was wrath, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be*

clean? So he turned and went away in a rage" (verses 11-12).

The "*behold, I thought*" mentality (verse 11) that leads to men wondering why a substitute for God's specific commands will not be just as productive (verse 12) is alive and well today. Many people give lip-service to the Bible while ignoring the Scriptures and faithfully following their own opinion, religious creed, or family tradition. The principle and truth taught in both Old and New Testaments cannot be stated often enough. God said to Israel, "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you*" (Deuteronomy 4:12). In closing out the words of the New Covenant, the Lord warned, "*I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book*"

(Revelation 22:18-19). In words that are clear, simple, and easy to understand, the Lord declares one will lose access to the tree of life and the holy city who **adds to** or **takes from** the inspired Scriptures!

There are many churches today who are displeased with the Bible verse that says, "*let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law*" (1 Corinthians 14:34). They also reject 1 Timothy 2:12 which states: "*But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness.*" It has nothing to do with intellect, ability, or inferiority. The passage continues, "*For Adam was first formed, then Eve; and Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression*" (verses 13-14). God gave His reasons for women not having a leadership role over men in the church, but many today are displeased with God and are of the same mindset as was Naaman!

Numerous churches today are displeased with the Lord adding those who are saved to His church (Acts 2:47), and thus think they should vote on

people for church membership. Listen carefully to this revealing quote:

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism," and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that sense, "baptism was the door into the church." Now it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their "experience," and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. [*The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, Edward T. Hiscox, p. 22].

Can you believe such a statement? It is admitted at **one** time there were no denominations and the act of baptism put one into the church. "**Now it is different**" – says who? Where does God reveal a plan of salvation that is different from the one revealed during the apostolic age? Where is the Scripture that describes **candidates** giving their **experience** and their reception being decided by a **vote of the current members**? Why has baptism changed from being "the door into the church?" Easy answer! Men became displeased with the **Lord's church** and the **Lord's plan** for salvation and worship. The Baptists follow Naaman – not the Lord! They reason, "Behold, we think now it is different. Denominations are now needed, and candidates for membership must give their experience and have their reception decided by a vote of the members."

Yes, many churches are displeased with God! It will not, however, change His inspired Word (John 12:48).

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BACK ISSUES ON THE WEBSITE

We would like to encourage you to visit our website at:

www.fultoncountygospelnews.org, as several years of back issues have recently been added. Special thanks goes to Michael Hatcher, evangelist with the Bellview church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, and to Denise Mowery, secretary at Bellview, for their efforts in making these available.

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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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