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APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY

By Ordell Heavin

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:41, 42.)

The words of the above text sets forth some characteristic marks of the Christian life in the early church. God had set the apostles in the church, and they constituted the visible center of unity of the newly established institution. From them went forth the doctrine, truth, and discipline of the Lord for the church. The early church was one body (Eph. 4:4-6) united upon the principles set forth by the apostles. The early church was united both in what it was and in what it did. The above text sets forth four principles necessary for this unity.

First, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, or teaching. The apostles taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; John 16:13). This teaching was necessary for bringing the new converts into full and complete discipleship. Their new faith needed careful and continuous instruction. The apostles were the ones chosen by the Lord to make known his will to man. Their teaching at first was done orally, but that which they taught was no different that that which they wrote later. We have in book form that which at first was in earthen vessels. Thus from the very beginning the church was dependent upon a teaching ministry for unity and survival, and such is just as true today. We, too, must continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

Second, they continued steadfastly in fellowship. This was a relationship between individual members which involved them in a common and mutual interest. There are three ways in which the principles of fellowship was applied in the early church. (1) It was evident by their encouragement of one another in spiritual matters and worship (Heb. 10:24, 25), (2) it was evident by their united efforts to spread the gospel and help one another (1 Cor. 16:1, 2), (3) and it was evident by

their mutual regard and esteem for each (Phil. 2:3-5).

Third, they continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread. This obviously had reference to the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19, 20). While the breaking of bread is not said to be the most important part of their worship, it is specified that it was for this purpose that the disciples met upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). It was of this act that Jesus said, "This do in rememberance of me." (1 Cor. 11:24, 25.) The breaking of bread was a commemoration (1 Cor. 11:24, 25), a declaration (1 Cor. 11:26), and a communion (1 Cor. 10:16). In this act the Christian's mind is continually brought back to the death of his Lord, reminding him of the basis of his hope, and of his participation in the benefits of the Lord's death.

And fourth, they continued steadfastly in prayers. Prayer was an important part of both their public and private devotions. These early Christians were encouraged to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer was more than just talking to God, it was a means of keeping them in close contact and fellowship with God. Through both prayer and the study of God's word, they found a source of strength for their life.

These four things played a vital role in the unity and growth of the early church. They built upon the solid foundation of the apostles' doctrine, which was their sole rule for faith and practice. They developed a,-mutual respect and esteem for one another. They continually centered their minds upon Christ in their worship. And they constantly looked to God for guidance and help through prayer. May we learn to go back to apostolic Christianity, and apply the principles that guided them to unity and success in living for the Lord.

They That Hunger and Thirst

By Terry Frizzell

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6.)

Hunger and thirst are two of man's most demanding appetites. Man will do almost anything to obtain food and drink when he is hungry and thirsty. To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to feel the most intense desire to obtain it. Under a heathen religion, and even under Judaism, such a desire could not be fully satisfied; but under the rich provisions of the kingdom of Christ, it may be; and the promise is that it shall be satisfied. Paul shows that the Jewish system could not satisfy this need, saying, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:3, 4.) And in Hebrews 7:19 he wrote, "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."

Those who desire righteousness want to know how they may walk after the Spirit and where to find the better hope. Paul gives the answer in Rom. 1:16, 17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." And in Rom. 10:17 he said, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Therefore we conceive that righteousness is knowing, doing, and having faith in the word of God.

When one hungers and thirsts after the knowledge of God, he will do so in much the same way that he would if it were his physical needs. He will seek out every opportunity to obtain the spiritual needs of his soul. In II Tim. 2:15 Paul shows one way he will search, saying, "Study to show thyself approved unto God..." All who

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[&]quot;He who blackens others with gossip does not whiten himself."

[&]quot;An angry person opens his mouth and shuts his mind."

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They That Hunger and Thirst (Cont.)

hunger and thirst after righteousness will study to know and do the will of God, that they may be found right in his sight.

The promise that they shall be filled, is realized in part by the actual attainment of a higher degree of righteousness living. No one can seek after righteousness by a study of God's word, and by applying it to their lives, without becoming more like Christ. Christ lived a perfect life, and by our following his example we will reach this higher degree of righteousness.

The promise is also realized in part by the perfect forgiveness of our sins. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1.) In Eph. 1:7 Paul said that in Christ "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." We have forgiveness only in Christ. But how and when do we get into Christ? In Romans 6:3-4 Paul said, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 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." The soul is enrichened and the spiritual needs abundently fulfilled for those in Christ who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

What Is The New Birth?

By Harold Turner

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I saw unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:3-5.)

There is much being said in churches today about the need to be born again. The need is clearly stated by Jesus in the above Scripture. Unless a man is born again he has no hope of entering heaven. So the need is clear, but there are questions about what this new birth is, how it takes place, and when one is born again. Many openly admit that they do not know how and when it takes place, but suggest that when it happens one will know it. Such an answer does not satisfy the person who sincerely desires to do God's will. Such an answer makes the new birth a mystery, and excludes the individual having any direct involvement to bring about this new birth.

Other passages which deal with the new birth help us to better understand what is involved in it, and how it takes place. In John 1:11-13 John said of Jesus, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This passage suggests several important things to consider. It points out that we are born by the will of God, that this birth makes us a child of God, and that one must believe in and receive Christ before the new birth takes place. Since we must be born again of the will of God, what is involved?

In James 1:18 the Bible states, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.." And with this Peter writes, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorrputible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Peter 1:23, 25.) These two passages show that the new birth is accomplished as the result of planting of a seed - the word of truth, the gospel. John said that we were born by the will of God, and James shows that by his will he begats us by the word of truth. We know to have a birth, we must first plant the seed that will

bring about the birth. This seed is the word of God.

In Luke 8:4-15 Jesus shows that the seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God (vr. 11), must be planted and received in the heart of man. In this text Jesus showed that man is responsible to receive or reject the word. Thus showing that man has a direct responsibility in bringing about the new birth. If he rejects the seed, the word, there can be no birth take place.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." This passage indicates that there is more to the new birth than just receiving the seed into one's heart by faith. It is not he that "believeth" the will of the Father that will enter the kingdom, but he that "doeth" his will.

Before proceeding, let's sum up some things from the above passages. (1) We are born of the will of God (John 1:13). (2) He begats us with the word of truth (James 1:18). (3) We are born again by the word of God (1 Peter 1:23). (4) The word is the seed that produces the new birth (Luke 8:11). To enter into the kingdom we must do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21).

Now let's look at the statement of Jesus in John 3:5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

What is the role of the Spirit in the new birth? The Spirit brought the seed to man (Acts 1:2). Notice the first example of conversion in Acts 2. In vr. 4 the apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. In vr. 37 when the people heard this word, they were pricked in their heart. The Spirit had planted the seed in their heart. In vr. 41 "they that gladly received his word were baptized..." The Spirit had instructed them to "Repent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." These people were born again. They were born again by the word of God, by the Spirit, and by water. The word is the seed, the Spirit brought the seed into their hearts, and by faith they received the seed by being baptized. Every example of conversion followed the same pattern. The word was first preached, those who believed it were then baptized. Jesus said, "Preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:15, 16.) This is the same as being born again of water and the Spirit.

[&]quot;To lose a friend is one of the greatest of all loses."

[&]quot;The reason some people require so much of others is that they require so little of themselves."

[&]quot;Experience is something you get while looking for something else."

The Sin of Presumption

By W.L. Totty

To sin presumptuously is to do that which is known to be forbidden by God or to audaciously assume that one has the authority to alter God's law to suit his own will. As synonyms of the noun "presumption," Webster gives, "audacity, impudence, insolence," whereas the opposite would be "modesty, deference, respectfulness."

After having stated that the "law of the Lord is perfect," that his statutes, "are right," that his commandments are "pure," that the fear of the Lord is "clean, enduring for ever," that His judgments are "true and righteous altogether," and that by them his servant "is warned," in the long ago the Psalmist prayed to God that he would "keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." (Psalm 19:7-13.)

Throughout the ages God has made a difference between sins committed in ignorance and those that are presumptuous, not that each type will not receive a just recompense, but that the judgment for the presumptuous sin will be more severe. Even before David's time, the Lord through Moses decreed: "Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment. that soul shall be utterly cut off; his inquity shall be upon him." (Num. 14:32-36.)

Other examples of the punishment for presumptuous deeds, such as worshiping other gods (Deut. 17:2-5) or failing to hearken unto the priest or judge in godly decisions of matters (Deut. 17:8-13), can be found in the Old Testament. Prophets of God were known to speak presumptuously. The Lord God said, "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die." (Deut. 18:20.)

Man must not be deceived in thinking that, because these judgments and punishments were commanded in the Old Testament, we are freed from punishment for speaking or doing things presumptuously under the law of Christ. Keep in

mind that God has warned us that the things written in the Old Testament were "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10:11.) "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily," the Bible says, "therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." (Eccl. 8:11.) But we may be assured that the punishment will be administered eventually for all unrepented sins of which we may have been guilty.

James says that for us to say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (James 4:13), is speaking presumptuously. We know not what shall be on the morrow. He says our life is a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. James says we should not be boasting about what we shall do tomorrow. It is evil to do so. Rather, he says, what we ought to say is, "If the Lord will, we shall do this, or that." Solomon said, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." (Prov. 27:1.)

Of those who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government, the apostle Peter says, "Presumptuous are they, self willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." (II Peter 2:10).) This is the reason that it is imperative that an elder not be "selfwilled." (Titus 1:7.) If one is selfwilled, he will be apt to show more concern for doing things his way than God's way; or he might be disposed to judge something to be good under certain circumstances regardless of what the Bible says. (Prov. 14:12.)

It is presumptuous for one to teach something that is contrary to the doctrine taught by the apostles. (Gal. 1:8, 9.) It is presumptuous for one to say, "I know the Bible says this, but I think..." When the Bible tells us not to forsake the assembling (Heb. 10:25), it is presumptuous of us to think we can escape the damnation of hell when we deliberately choose to stay away from the worship. When the Lord has told us to lay by in store upon the first day of the week as we have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:2), it is presumptuous of us to act like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). When the Lord has given us the example of commemorating his death and suffering upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), it is impudence to opine that it may be done on Thursday night. It is an insolent attitude

on our part if we think that we can be saved by faith only (James 2:17, 24). How can one have the audacity to say that baptism is unnecessary to one's salvation when the Lord has said that "baptism doth also now save us." (I Pet. 3:21.)

In the language of the man after God's own heart, we pray: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:13, 14.)

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- "Crooked rivers get that way by following the line of least resistance. So do some Christians."
- "There is no limit to the power of prayer except your faith."
- "A little faith and a great God is far better than a great faith and a little God."
- "It is much easier to carry your cross than to drag it."
- "Never judge a man's actions until you know his motives."
- "A Christian is a living sermon whether or not he preaches a word."

Have Miracles Ceased?

Frequently people speak of having experienced a miracle, or of some event as being a miracle. If a person escapes unharmed from some near disaster, the escape is usually referred to as a miracle. Such happenings would best be defined as an accident. Webster defined a miracle as "an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, especially to an act of God." Because a person escapes unharmed from an automobile accident, or some other near disaster, does not mean that he has experienced a miracle.

The miracles recorded in the Bible were happenings that were contradictory to scientific laws. For a person to literally walk upon water is scientifically impossible, but Jesus did this. Jesus once spoke to a tree and it immediately withered. He also spoke to the wind and the sea and caused a great calm. It is scientifically impossible to control nature by words, but Jesus did this. Jesus healed diseased bodies by simply touching them, or by just speaking to them. Too, he spoke to the dead and they came back to life. These were miracles, not just some accidental happening.

Do such miracles still exist, or have they ceased? We know that there are people who claim to have the power to perform miracles, but do they? Have you ever known of anyone who could speak to, or touch a person who was missing an arm and the missing arm immediately grew back on? Have you ever known of anyone speaking to a person who had no eyes, and immediately he received new eyes? Have you ever known of anyone who had the power to raise the dead? It takes miraculous power to perform such deeds. The miracles worked by Jesus and the apostles were not something better felt than seen. People were restored whole of missing parts of the body. The miracles were happenings that could be seen.

What was the purpose for working miracles? John tells us why Jesus worked miracles. He said, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30, 31.) Jesus worked miracles to convince people that He was the Christ, the Son of God. When Lazarus died, Jesus told the apostles, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." (John 11:15.) The miracles were for the purpose of causing the people to believe that He was the Christ. When Jesus had well established this proof, He returned to heaven. He did not need to stay here and continue to work miracles to cause others to believe. His miracles proved that He was the Christ, and they have been written in the gospel as sufficient proof for us to believe in Him.

What was the purpose for the miracles worked by the apostles? They were not worked just to cause people to believe, but rather to confirm the gospel they preached. In Mark 16:15 Jesus commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel to every creature. In verse 20 the Bible says, "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Too, notice Hebrews 2:3,4, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" They performed miracles to "confirm" the word they preached. The word was designed to produce the faith. Notice Rom. 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." If miracles were worked by the apostles to confirm the word they preached (and this is the only purpose the Bible states for their working miracles), for what purpose would miracles be worked today? The word has already been confirmed to be from God.

In 1 Cor. 13:8-13 Paul shows that the miraculous gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge would all cease, along with all the other miraculous gifts. They would end when knowledge was in whole rather than in part, that is, when the full revelation of God's word was given and recorded. Paul said, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Everything in part (the different miraculous gifts) would end when "that which is perfect" is come. Some contend that this has reference to the second coming of Christ. Jesus is never referred to as "that" but rather to a personal being.

However, Paul goes on to show that faith, hope and charity will abide after that which is perfect is come. When Jesus returns faith will pass away into knowledge, and hope will become a reali-

ty. But today both faith and hope are based upon the unseen, see Heb. 11:1, and Rom

James speaks of the gospel as "the perfect law of liberty." (James 1:25.) And Paul tells us that the Scriptures are profitable that "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) The Gospel is perfect, and able to make the man of God perfect. It is obvious "that" perfect thing that Paul spoke of in 1 Cor. 13:10. This being true, we can then be sure that miracles have ceased. They have fulfilled their purpose. Today the perfect law of liberty will thoroughly finish us unto all good works. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16), and it is able to build us up, and give us an inheritance in heaven (Acts 20:32).

"Helping other people in their troubles leaves you little time to worry about your

"Error needs artificial support: truth can stand alone."

"The real Christian is like a good watch: open faced, busy hands, well regulated, and full of good works.

"Facts do not cease to exist just because they are ignored."

"One example is worth a thousand arguments."