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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 remembrance 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.

"He who blackens others with gossip does not whiten himself."

"An angry person opens his mouth and shuts his mind."

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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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 say 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.)

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.

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 enriched and the spiritual needs abundantly fulfilled for those in Christ who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

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 incorruptible, 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

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.

"To lose a friend is one of the greatest of all loses."

"The reason some people require so much of others is that they require so little of themselves."

"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 iniquity shall be upon him." (Num. 14:32-36.)

Other examples of the punishment for presumptuous deeds, such as worshipping 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."

