

# Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Publication No. 211780

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, AR

Volume 26

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

January, 1992

No. 1

## BAPTISM "FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS"

by Ted J. Clarke

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38 - KJV). The meaning of the phrase "for the remission of sins" in the verse above has long been a battleground in the interpretation of this important Scripture. Since many religious groups teach that one is saved without being baptized, they contend that Peter is telling the Jews to repent, which would forgive them of their sins, and then to be baptized "for (because of) the remission of sins." Others contend that Peter is saying to **both** "repent, and be baptized... for the remission of sins," meaning that one must repent and be baptized for (in order to obtain) the remission of sins. It is true that the English preposition "for" can mean either "because of" or "in order to obtain." If it is said that, "He was put in jail for stealing," we obviously mean that he was put in jail because he stole. If we say, "Come to the table for supper," we mean to come to the table in order to obtain or receive your supper. The way that a word is used in a particular setting will have to determine its meaning. While "for" in the English language may mean "because of," there are several reasons why this cannot be its proper meaning in Acts 2:38. Please note that the real distinction between the two uses of "for" is that "because of" means something past, it looks backward with a view to something already accomplished. Thus, to be baptized "because of remission of sins" would mean that one is baptized after one is forgiven of sins. The other use of "for" looks ahead or forward, with a view to receiving something not yet given. In this case, to be baptized for the remission of sins means in order to receive forgiveness. Does the "for" in Acts 2:38 look backward or forward? The Scriptures give the answer.

In Matthew 26:28 Jesus used the same identical phrase, "for the remission of sins." He said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Did Jesus mean that he was going to shed his blood "because" sins had already been forgiven? Or, was he saying that he was going to shed his blood "in order that" sins could be forgiven? Since Jesus had not yet shed his blood, his use of "for the remission of sins" looked forward, not backward. Jesus would shed his blood **in order to** purchase forgiveness of sins. Is there any good reason why the phrase "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38 should have a different meaning? No! In fact, there are reasons why it cannot mean anything different than Matthew 26:28. Note that the Jews to whom Peter spoke in Acts 2:38 were to "repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." **Both repentance and baptism are named before forgiveness of sins!** Were the Jews saved before they repented? Of course not. Acts 17:30, 31 says that God commands repentance of all men everywhere and that he will judge those who have not done so. Is repentance to be done in the name of Jesus? Indeed, Luke 24:47 says, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This is exactly what Peter is doing. But note, not only is repentance connected with the name of Jesus and remission of sins; baptism is also connected in the same way. The Jews were told to do **both (repent and be baptized)** "for" the remission of sins. Whatever repentance was "for," baptism was "for" the same reason. Since all agree that repentance was "for" (in order to obtain) remission of sins, baptism is "for" the identical cause. You cannot give the same "for" two different meanings. It cannot be in

order to obtain forgiveness when talking about repentance and then mean because sins were already forgiven when talking about baptism. In Peter's sermon both repentance and baptism came before forgiveness or remission of sins. This should not be surprising since Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Christ put both faith and baptism before salvation. Therefore, for Peter to put baptism before remission of sins, meaning salvation, should be no surprise.

In 1879, H. B. Hackett, one of the best Bible scholars of the Baptist Church, said in his Commentary on Acts, commenting on the phrase **for the remission of sins**,

"In order to obtain the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Luke 3:3) we connect naturally with both preceding verbs. This clause states the motive or object which should induce them to repent and be baptized. It enforces the entire exhortation, not one part of it to the exclusion of the other" (page 54).

Alvah Hovey, another respected Baptist scholar of the past, wrote about the phrase **for the remission of sins**, saying, "Here repentance and baptism are represented as leading to the forgiveness of sins" (Commentary on John, Appendix, page 420). Do we prove that baptism is in order to obtain remission of sins by quoting these scholars from the past? No, but we do show that such an interpretation is not the idea of an isolated group of crackpots. The real strength of the position that "for the remission of sins" means "in order to obtain forgiveness" is that such teaching is in harmony with all the rest of the teaching of the Bible. Note again the Scriptures already given.

This subject will be continued in the next issue with more quotes from other scholars and an in-depth look at some other pertinent Scriptures.

*It is better to fail in doing something than to succeed in doing nothing.*

**FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**

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**FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS**  
P. O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554  
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Publication No. 211780

## Who Is "Narrow-Minded"?

by Ron Wilson

Members of the church of Christ have often been called "narrow-minded" by our religious neighbors. It might be well to challenge this view.

If God's Word teaches that social-drinking is sin and we believe it, is that being "narrow-minded" (Proverbs 20:1)? Could we honestly say one is "open-minded" while refusing to accept God's Word on this subject?

Is it really "narrow-mindedness" to accept God's teaching concerning "indecent bodily movements" (lasciviousness: Gal. 5:19), and refrain from dancing? Is it "open-mindedness" to reject such teaching because one does not agree with it?

Was Jesus "narrow-minded" when He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16)? Are we "narrow-minded" because we obey what Jesus said? Is one "open-minded" when he refuses to accept this statement?

Can we honestly be accused of "narrow-mindedness" when refusing to worship God with man-made instruments of music because God, HIMSELF, designated singing as the music HE commands (Eph. 5:19)? Is it a mark of "open-mindedness" to GO BEYOND God's teaching and participate in worship using mechanical instruments of music (cf. 2 John 9-11)?

Are we "narrow-minded" because we

follow the example of the early church in observing the Lord's Supper every first day (Acts 20:7)? Is it "open-mindedness" to ignore this teaching?

Was Jesus "narrow-minded" when He said, "I will build MY church" (Matt. 16:18)? Are we "narrow-minded" because we insist one should be a member of the church Jesus built? Is one "open-minded" by belonging to a church man built?

When the Holy Spirit directed Paul to write "no divisions among you," was He "narrow-minded" (1 Cor. 1:10)? Are we "narrow-minded" by telling others what the Holy Spirit said? Is one "open-minded" by rejecting this teaching and participating in the division of denominationalism?

Was God "narrow-minded" to direct the inspired James to write, "by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone" (James 2:24)? Are we "narrow-minded" when we accept this statement of God? Is a man "open-minded" to state, "One is saved by faith alone"?

Are we really "narrow-minded" because we accept the Bible, God's Word, as the only "road-map" to heaven? Are others "open-minded" when relying upon their own subjective feelings and desires for their "road-map" (Proverbs 14:12)?

Perhaps it would be well to drop "narrow-minded" and "open-minded" and just be "Christ-minded" (Phil. 2:5). What is it to be "Christ-minded"? To pray to God as Jesus did in Matthew 26:39, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." That is the type of mind everyone should have. When God says something we should be "open" enough to accept it and "narrow" enough not to accept anything else.

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*An evil eye sees evil things - many times where there is no evil.*

## WHY IS THE VIRGIN MARY APPEARING AT MEDUGORJE?

by B. J. Clarke

The above question has been seen by this author on at least three billboards in the Metro Memphis area in the past few weeks. The answer to the question as given by the billboard is, "Because she wants you to know God loves you." The bottom of the advertisement gives credit for the billboard to the "Jesus Through Mary Foundation" located in Texas. Several observations concerning this question are in order.

First, what of these alleged appearances of the Virgin Mary in Medugorje, Yugoslavia? This is not the first place that has claimed to have been the recipient of a visit from Mary. A few years ago in Amman, Jordan, an Iraqi lady by the name of Una Karabashi, 18, asserted that the Virgin Mary had visited her in the hospital at least 10 times and carried on "long" conversations with her. She further claimed that she fasted for three days at Mary's request because "Mary promised me she will give me communion today." According to Karabashi, Mary drew cross-shaped marks on her body. Scores of people visited Karabashi in the hospital. Some asked her to bless their rosary beads. The alleged appearances at Medugorje are similar in description to the claims of Karabashi. The aforementioned claims are prime examples of the influence of Mariolatry—the worship of Mary. There can be no doubt that Mary is accorded a high place among women (Lk. 1:28). Yet, as we shall point out, there is no place in Scripture which assigns her a place such as is given her by the Catholic Church and the "Jesus Through Mary Foundation." My Bible teaches me that Mary has not in the past, is not now, nor will ever in the future appear in a vision to any human or group of human beings.

The Bible speaks of an appearance to Mary (Lk. 1:26ff) but never speaks of an

### POLICY STATEMENT

From time to time we receive requests from different groups to announce various works and events that are worthy news items. Since our paper is small and devoted to teaching the gospel of Christ, we have not thought it proper to devote part of its space to advertising these works, however good they might be. We appreciate knowing of these worthwhile efforts and will attempt to make them known in other ways, but for now we maintain our policy of not publishing news items or advertising. We thank you for your understanding. Ed.

appearance by Mary. Besides, what purpose could there possibly be for an appearance by Mary? Jesus told his apostles, shortly before his death, that there were many things he still needed to reveal to them, but that they weren't able to bear such revelations at that given time (Jn. 16:12). He then immediately told them, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..." (Jn. 16:13). Note that all revelation was to be given to the apostles for them to record in written form for future generations. Thus, we now have "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:4) in the written word of God. There is nothing that Mary, (or any other heavenly visitor, for that matter) could tell us today that is not already found in Scripture that we need to know to be saved (Jas. 1:21).

A second major observation concerning these alleged visits by Mary has to do with the answer given on the billboard as to why she is supposedly doing this. The billboard says she is appearing because she wants you to know that God loves you. I don't need a visit from the Virgin Mary to learn of God's love for me! God proved that long ago by sending a heavenly visitor to be miraculously conceived in the Virgin Mary and to become flesh and dwell among men as God and man all wrapped into one (Jn. 1:1, 14). Jesus incarnate is the manifestation of God's love for me (Jn. 3:16). Please observe that John 3:16 does not say that "God so loved the world that he sent the Virgin Mary to appear to people throughout the world to let them know." The text says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 Jn. 4:9). When I see Jesus hanging upon the cross, that is sufficient proof of God's love for me. Why would God send Mary to reveal something that he has already revealed through His Son?

One final observation needs to be made concerning the blasphemous name of the foundation in Texas. The very idea that we approach Jesus through Mary is an insult to our Lord of the rankiest sort. She is not the mediator between man and Jesus. "For there is one God, and one mediator between

God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). It is Jesus who ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). It is sinful to put Mary in a position of greater honor than our Lord. I remember visiting a Catholic mass on one occasion just for the purpose of observing the proceedings. I was stunned at what I saw. Near the front of the auditorium there was a statue of Jesus on one side and a statue of Mary on the other. It astonished me and saddened me to see these individuals come down the aisle, turn their back on Jesus and bow down to the statue of Mary. It's wrong to bow down to any graven image, even one of Jesus, but I was taught a lot that day concerning just how important Mary is to the Catholics. It is a sin to worship or bow down to anyone but the Lord God (Mt. 4:10, Acts 10:25, 26; Rev. 22:8, 9).

Why is the Virgin Mary appearing at Medugorje? She is not appearing there! The real question is, "Why did Jesus Christ appear to the whole world for some 33 years?" Because he wanted us to know God loves us and he wanted to save us by his grace (Titus 2:11). There is another glorious appearing of Jesus scheduled for the future (Titus 2:13). We know not when it shall be. But we need to be ready for that great judgment day by responding to the love of God as exhibited in Jesus Christ. Mary can't take us to heaven. Only Christ can. Let us always make Jesus the center of our faith!

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## A SURPRISE WITNESS

by Ted J. Clarke

Perhaps we have all watched a thrilling movie or TV show that ended in a trial for the accused. As the trial progressed it looked like the guilty person would go free or the innocent person would be convicted. Suddenly, the "Perry Mason" type lawyer would bring in a surprise witness who would testify truthfully and justice was served. It is a great plot for entertainment, and even more dramatic when the truthful testimony comes from a source no one expected.

The Bible has been put on trial by unbelievers time and time again. Testimony from wild-eyed fanatics who said that God told them to butcher babies is always accepted by the media as proof that religion is dangerous. But when someone comes forth with some sincere and thought-provoking testimony that the Bible helped one to weather an extremely severe tribulation in that person's life, that testimony gets very little attention from the press, even when it is one of their own.

A case in point is the recent release of news reporter Terry Anderson, who had been held hostage in Lebanon for nearly six years. I do not know Terry Anderson well, nor do I know what faith he holds religiously. I did hear what he said when asked by reporters as to how he survived his ordeal. He remarked that one of the first books he received after being captured was a Bible. He went on to say that the Bible was a major source of strength and comfort to him during his many years of captivity, and that he gave much credit to his reading of the Scriptures for the ability to endure in hope. Now, what makes this surprising in the first place is that Mr. Anderson is a member of the media establishment, which is generally extremely biased against the Christian religion. It is unusual if Mr. Anderson is the exception to the rule. **If he had faith in the Bible before his captivity**, his testimony is still valid, but if he discovered the power of God's word for the first time in his severe circumstances, it is all the more impressive. A surprise witness, formerly indifferent or even hostile to the Bible now sings its praises.

Was his testimony heard by all of the reporters who interviewed him? Would

(Continued on page 4)

you be surprised if I said, "No!"? After Terry said what he did about the Bible, **there was not one follow-up question on the subject!** They wanted to know what power he summoned to maintain his sanity and hope for those many hears. But, when he said, "The Bible," they lost all interest. The media establishment is not going to do anything that makes the Bible look good!

What Mr. Anderson learned in a time of great distress, you can learn in your normal daily life. God and his word are not just for emergencies, like a fire escape. The Bible gives meaning and purpose to life as it guides us every step of the way. Read the psalmist's tribute to the word of God in Psalm 119, all of it. One familiar verse sums it up well. **"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"** (verse 105). We should be thankful for Terry Anderson's honesty regarding the Bible's role in bringing him through his captivity. While he may be a surprise witness for the Bible, we should not be surprised about the power people find in the Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick (living) and powerful..." Have you discovered that power in your daily life?

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## 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).

## 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).

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