

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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THE WORK OF JOHN THE BAPTIZER

By Ted J. Clarke

INTRODUCTION

Some religious groups mistakenly teach that the mission of John the Baptist was to establish the church of our Lord. To them, John, the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, was not **the** Baptist, but **a** Baptist, the first one. However, the word "Baptist," as it applies to John, does not signify that he was the first in the line of those who wear his title today, who became the church known by that name. Quite the contrary, the word "Baptist" is never used in the New Testament to refer to any church, nor to anyone other than John, the forerunner of Christ.

The name "Baptist," as it applies to John, means nothing more than "a baptizer," one who immersed believers in water that they might receive remission of sins (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:3-4). (See Strong's Concordance) A translation of the New Testament in 1865 by the **American Bible Union**, which was a Baptist publication committee, correctly identified John the Baptist as "John the Immerser" throughout their translation. The translation also properly translated baptism "Immersion," which delighted the Baptists. However the translation was not well received by Baptists since it removed from the Bible the name of "Baptist" which they had adopted for themselves. The American Standard Version of 1901 correctly translates this point in Mark 6:14, 24, calling him John the Baptizer. Accordingly, John was not called "the Baptist" because he established the Baptist church and originated the teachings of those who call themselves by that title today, but because he baptized (immersed) people who believed and repented. In fact, John's teaching denies some of the doctrines of the church that wears his name. We will prove this as we develop some thoughts later on.

JOHN'S MISSION

John's work was not that of a builder of the church but of a preparer of the way for Jesus. Mark 1:2-4 quotes from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5 to verify the preceding comment. In ancient days when a king was to go on a journey, a forerunner went ahead to prepare the way over which the king would travel, seeing that the roads were made smooth and announcing the king's coming. Spiritually speaking, this was John's responsibility. Instead of roads he prepared people and turned them to God (Malachi 4:5). Jesus also identified John the Baptist as the Elijah prophesied to come (Matthew 11:14; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17). There is therefore no future Elijah to come, since John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy.

John the Baptist was to preach to the Jews: (1) the soon to be established kingdom of God, (2) repentance towards God and baptism for the remission of sins, and (3) faith in the Christ whom he would identify (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4; Acts 19:4). John knew his mission and **his place** in service to God. He did not assume for himself what many are claiming for him today.

If John the Baptist were to return to earth he would be horrified to see that churches had been named after him instead of Christ. John identified himself as the **friend** of the **bridegroom**, not the bridegroom (John 3:29). The bride of Christ, His church (2 Corinthians 11:2), ought to wear His name, **not** the name of the bridegroom's friend or best man! John knew that he was to decrease and Christ was to increase (John 3:30). Therefore, John did not seek to have Christ's church wear the name "Baptist." What husband who truly loved his wife and sacrificed himself for her would be pleased with her wearing another man's name? None, of course. **Neither can Christ be**

pleased with those who claim to be His bride but wear the name of the friend of the bridegroom. There is something in a name! (Acts 4:12; Philippians 2:9-11).

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Since the work of John was to the Jews alone, his preaching on baptism must be understood in that light. The Jews already believed in God, but they needed to repent toward God for their sins against Him under the Law of Moses. They were then to be baptized "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4,5). This baptism looked forward to the blood of Christ which was to be shed on the cross. They were then prepared for Christ and were to believe in Him and His work (Acts 19:4). John's baptism was immersion, for that is what the word "baptism" means when translated from the original Greek manuscripts into English. See any standard Greek-English lexicon. John 3:34 says that John baptized where there was "much water" in order to meet the demands of immersing the crowds coming to him for baptism.

John also had the privilege of baptizing Christ (Matthew 3:16,17). Jesus was **not** baptized for the remission of His sins for He had none (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness." Christ's disciples also baptized as John did, both while John was baptizing and during John's imprisonment (John 4:1, 2).

John's baptism was only valid until the first Pentecost following Christ's resurrection and ascension. At that time baptism began to be preached "**in the name of Jesus Christ**" for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). The Law of Moses, under which both John and Christ had lived was now done away (Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 2:14). The Law of Christ was effective on Pentecost and thereafter, so the baptism John preached was no longer acceptable to God. The authority of Christ, His

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name, was now in effect (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47). The case in Acts 19:1-7 proves the point just stated. The apostle Paul had found men in Ephesus who evidently had been baptized with John's baptism after Pentecost. These men were probably taught and baptized by Apollos before he "learned the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24-28). When Paul informed them that John's baptism was not valid on this side of the cross, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5). Those today who baptize with John's baptism need to know the "way of God more accurately." Those who have been improperly baptized need to be baptized properly in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; 19:5).

Baptism under Christ's law is to be in His name (authority), in order to receive the forgiveness of sins, and to put on Christ, being added to His body, the church, by God (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 5:23). If your baptism was not in

harmony with these scriptures, you have not been baptized in the name of Christ. You need to follow the example God gave of these Ephesians in Acts 19:5. It does make a difference how and why we are baptized.

JOHN THE BAPTIST & THE KINGDOM

John began his ministry teaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2). After John, at least 83 other inspired men preached that God's kingdom was about to come into existence. Jesus, Matthew 4:17; the twelve apostles, Matthew 10:1,7; and the seventy disciples, Luke 10:1,9 all taught that the kingdom was "at hand," that is, near, ready to appear. Were these men all false prophets, or did the kingdom come as it was prophesied nearly 2,000 years ago?

Many, who wear John's title as "Baptist" to describe their religious beliefs, say that the kingdom was not established as promised. They contend that the kingdom will not come until Jesus comes the second time. Such ideas are commonly known as premillennialism. However, John was a prophet and God has promised that His prophets' words will not fall empty to the ground. (Matthew 11:7-9; 1 Samuel 3:19). Christ also told of the nearness of the kingdom 2,000 years ago (Matthew 4:17)! Was He also a false prophet? Let it not be said that the unbelief of the Jews prevented God from establishing the kingdom. Romans 3:3,4 says that God will be faithful to His promises in spite of man's unbelief. Man's words may fail, but God's will not! God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18)!

Christ never came to set up an earthly kingdom (John 18:36). He came to earth to be crucified for our sins, thus redeeming us. Read Isaiah 53, which was written 700 years before Jesus came to earth. It does not teach that He came to set up an earthly kingdom. Matthew 20:28 confirms the fact that Jesus came to earth to die for man's sins. If the time when Christ came was not the right time to set up the kingdom, why didn't God know about it? In fact, Galatians 4:4

says that Jesus came "in the fulness of time," which must have been the right time according to God! Attempts to make distinctions between the "church" Christ promised to build and the "kingdom" which He promised to establish are a major reason for the confusion about the kingdom. The church of Christ and the kingdom of God and Christ are the same institution. In Matthew 16:18,19 Jesus promised to build His church and give Peter the keys to the kingdom at the same time. Those today who reject the idea that the kingdom is the church make the same mistake that the Jews did in rejecting Christ's spiritual kingdom.

We just showed that 84 inspired men, including Christ and John the Baptist, preached that God's kingdom was about to appear (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:1,7; Luke 10:1,9). Jesus taught that His kingdom and His church are the same institution, simply described by different terms (Matthew 16:18-19). Christ is Head of His body, the church (Ephesians 1:21-23) and King of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Members of Christ's church are citizens in His kingdom. Peter was given the "keys of the kingdom," symbolizing the authority to admit people entrance into it. He used these "keys" in Acts 2:14-47 when he preached the terms of salvation in Christ and taught we are added to the church by God. In his sermon Peter spoke of Christ being raised from the dead to be king and proclaimed Him as "Lord and Christ" (anointed king) (Acts 2:29-36). Before Acts 2 the scriptures speak of the kingdom and church as yet to come. After Acts 2 the scriptures speak of the kingdom/church as being in actual existence. There is, of course, the eternal phase of the kingdom which we will inherit in heaven that is yet future. The kingdom of which we must **now** be citizens is identical to the church Christ built (Matthew 16:18,19). Only those **now** enter Christ's church/kingdom will be ushered into the eternal kingdom which

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- Mammoth Spring Church of Christ
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Peter mentions, if they are faithful when Jesus comes a second time (2 Peter 1:10-11; Hebrews 9:27-28).

Note the following: [1] The preaching on Pentecost (Acts 2) and following was concerned with the "good news" concerning the "kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:30,31) People responded to teaching about the kingdom by believing and being baptized, at which time the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). [2] The church (saints) at Colossae had been "delivered . . . from the power of darkness and translated . . . into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). They couldn't have been put **into** the kingdom of Christ if it didn't exist, could they? [3] Hebrews 12:28 says that first century Christians were receiving (present tense, right then) ". . . a **kingdom** which cannot be shaken . . ." This is the indestructible kingdom which Daniel 2:44 prophesied. [4] Christ is now King and has been for nearly 2,000 years. His crown is "glory and honor" (Hebrews 2:9; Philippians 2:9-11). Christ was King of kings when John wrote Revelation 1:5. Those to whom the apostle John wrote were "kings and priests" along with John "in the kingdom" (Revelation 1:6, 9). Note that this was also called the "kingdom . . . of Jesus Christ."

All of the above Scriptures are understandable if we recognize that Christ's kingdom and Christ's church are simply different designations for the same institution. We find ourselves arguing against John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles if we deny this fact.

The work of John the Baptizer was not to start his church, but to prepare the way for Christ to come and build His church (Matthew 16:18-19; Romans 16:16). We will gladly study this in more detail with any that wish to do so. [To be continued.]

stated, "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? why hast thou set me as a mark against thee, so that I am a burden to myself?" (Job 7:20). In sinning, Job admitted that he had become "a burden to himself." Indeed how foolishly we often act in being "our own worst enemy." When we sin against God we become a burden to ourselves.

To Christians, John said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I Jn. 1:9). Do you have sins that you need to confess to God?

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[Eddy Gilpin was editor of **FCGN** from June of 1989 through August of 1991. **FCGN** grew under his editorship, both in numbers and popularity. Eddy is a talented writer and we are happy to have a good store of articles from him for use in future issues. - Editor]

"I HAVE SINNED"

by Eddy Gilpin

The phrase "I have sinned" appears nineteen times in the Bible (KJV). It was stated by ten different people; some who were sincere, some who were not. A study of this phrase reveals some interesting lessons.

First, the person who said it the most was David. What makes this of great interest is the fact that David was said to be "a man after mine (God's) own heart" (Acts 13:22). Certainly if a man with the credentials of David often needed to take stock of his life and confess sin, so should every individual (cf. II Sam. 12:13; 24:10, 17; I Chron. 21:8; Ps. 41:4).

Second, some who made the statement were not sincere. These were Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20) and Judas (Mt. 27:4). From these it can be learned that such confession must proceed from the heart and not just from the mouth.

Third, one of the subjects who made the statement said it twice; once to himself and again to his father. While in the "far country," the prodigal son made a decision and said to himself, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned . . ." (Lk. 15:18). Upon returning home He made the confession to His father (Lk. 15:21). From this occasion it can be seen that, although God knows our hearts, He still wants to hear our voices. While it is the case that one can pray to God without doing so in an audible way (cf. I Sam. 1:13), it is also the case that prayer is an act in which one must engage with all his mind. Thus, one must approach God in the fashion that God has revealed (Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15, 16) and not after the dictates of his own heart.

Fourth, it is interesting to note the statement that accompanies Job's remark that he had sinned. He

ARE WE STILL THE "CHURCH OF CHRIST?"

By Terry W. Frizzell

Recently I was researching the history of religious groups that exist today in the United States. In researching this material I went to the local library and checked out a book entitled "Handbook of Denominations in the United States" by Frank S. Mead, and revised by Samuel S. Hill. Both of these men were members of denominations (to my knowledge). Frank S. Mead first published this book in 1951, and the copy which I referenced from was the 8th edition, revised by Samuel S. Hill in 1985. I didn't find the background material that I was looking for all that interesting, however, there was something I did find interesting. Mead had a listing for churches of Christ in which he gave a definition of what separated the churches of Christ from the rest of the religious world. The following was what he wrote about the churches of Christ (all of the bold emphasis is strictly done by me for the purpose of pointing a few things out, not Mead's).

"Because this is a brotherhood and **not a denomination**, centralized activities such as record keeping

are opposed . . . There is a distinctive plea for unity at the heart of the churches of Christ - a unity that is **Bible-based**. It is believed that the Bible is the beginning place in and through which God-fearing people can achieve spiritual oneness - to 'speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent' in all matters pertaining to faith and morals. Consequently, members recognize no other written creed or confession of faith. **In all religious matters, there must be a 'thus saith the Lord.'**"

Mead writes further:

"They contend for a strict adherence to the New Testament pattern of worship and church organization . . . Their worship was simple, and they opposed the addition of instrumental music on the grounds that **the New Testament did not authorize it and that the early church did not use it.**"

Mead continues:

"Today one of the outstanding features of the churches of Christ lies in **their acceptance of the Bible as a true and completely adequate revelation**. This basic concept has resulted in such characteristic practices as weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, baptism by immersion, a cappella song, a vigorous prayer life, support of church needs through voluntary giving, and a program of preaching and teaching the Bible."

Mead goes on to write:

"Since all official status in these institutions is lacking, none being authorized to speak for the entire church, **their conformity in ideas and teachings is all the more remarkable.**"

As I read this I was reminded of many things. In actuality, I felt like the writer had picked up a Bible and simply written down the description of the congregations of the Lord's church that we find in the New Testament. Sadly, the writer was probably closer to the truth than many congregations claiming to be the church of Christ today. How many congregations still stress unity based upon the Bible, and not based upon acceptance of diversity? How many congregations still demand a "thus saith the Lord?" How many oppose instrumental music because it is still not authorized by the New

Testament? How many still accept the Bible as the complete and adequate revelation?

I would suggest that if you are a member of a congregation that no longer holds to these things, it might be time to look elsewhere. There is no longer vast conformity in churches of Christ, because many people have turned away from God's Word and followed in the footsteps of the denominational world. If Mead were to write his book today, these distinctions, in many cases, could no longer be found. However, if one reads the New Testament, he finds these distinctions were found in the congregations of the Lord's church in the first century.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said: "... upon *this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" That church is in existence, it is still distinctive from the denominational world because it is following God's Word, and it will always exist just like Jesus promised. Are you a part of that church?

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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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