

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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BAPTISM, ANYTHING NEW?

by Owen D. Olbricht

Ever since the reformation movement when the doctrine of faith only was introduced, baptism has been a hotly debated topic in religious circles. For this reason many facets of baptism have come under the scrutiny of Bible reading people and scholars alike.

One cannot read the New Testament without noticing how often baptism is mentioned. John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:33), resulting in many submitting to his baptism. Jesus was baptized by him (Matt. 3:13-17) and Christ may have led more to be baptized than did John (John 4:1,2).

By instructing his disciples to go into all the world to teach and baptize (Mark 16:15, 16; Matt. 28:19), Jesus indicated that baptism is for all who will believe. The book of Acts records many examples of people who became followers of Jesus through Baptism (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 38; 9:18; 10:48; 18:8; etc.). The letters of Paul are addressed to those who had been baptized (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12).

Disagreements usually do not arise over the prominence of baptism in New Testament teaching, but rather arise over the nature of baptism and its importance in man's relationship with God. Questions arise concerning what one must understand when he is being baptized and whether or not baptism is a requirement of God before He will forgive man's sins. God will be the judge of what He will accept and what He will not accept; however, man has the responsibility to learn what is God's will concerning baptism.

A person must juggle and reconstruct Scripture to escape clear statements which teach that in order to be saved and forgiven one must be baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). No amount of twisting Scripture can change this fact. One of the major problems is that many see baptism as an empty ritual instead of a purposeful act of submission and commitment to Jesus. Baptism

is based on man's resolve to serve Jesus and faith in what God is doing (Col. 2:12) and not on what man is accomplishing, for in baptism man does not achieve anything based on his own merit.

If one does not relate his baptism to Jesus' death for his sins, he has failed both to have faith in the blood of Jesus while being baptized and to relate baptism to his forgiveness. Salvation is given because of faith in Jesus' blood (Rom. 3:25), which faith is what makes baptism valid (Mark 16:16). If this is not true, then one can be saved without faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus while being baptized. Such a baptism would not relate to the purpose and content of the gospel.

For this reason, baptism must be an expression of faith in the gospel, which gospel includes the fact that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected (1 Cor. 15:1-3). In baptism one must share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, resulting in a new life (Rom. 6:3, 4), so that he can receive the benefits of the gospel. A baptism that does not include these elements is not a new birth (John 3:3-5), but rather an empty ritual devoid of the purposes included in New Testament teaching.

In baptism a crucifixion of the old life is to take place so that a new life can follow. Without a death to the past a new life cannot begin. Paul stated that in baptism the old person is crucified with Jesus so that the person being baptized should no longer serve sin (Rom. 6:6). This is the change that took place in Paul's life (Gal. 2:20) after he had been buried with Jesus in baptism. These elements are essential before baptism will bring about a new birth and forgiveness of sins.

What counts with God is being a new creature (Gal. 6:15). Baptism puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:27), a spiritual relationship which makes one a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). Only proper understanding and obedience from the heart can bring about such a change (Rom. 6:17,

18). Rather than being an empty ritual, baptism must be a new birth, a total change in one's spiritual makeup.

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[See the section "Book Blurbs" for a review of brother Olbricht's new book on baptism. - Ed.]

A CONTRADICTION OF TERMS

by O. L. Grisham

If indeed God brings "unity out of diversity," we most certainly have "a contradiction of terms," which is diametrically opposed to how God really brings unity. Diversity means that which is diverse, or different. Granted, **true Christianity and divine unity** is certainly diverse or different from many things which man calls unity, or Christianity. However, it is obvious that God does demand and command unity, and He provides the plan, doctrine, faith, teaching, way, truth, and life (His divine scheme and word), where by that divine unity may be obtained by **all** (and that means **all**!) Besides that **one divine plan**, there is certainly no other. "God is not the author of confusion..." (1 Corinthians 14:33).

This is true of all other words that would describe God's **one divine plan and common grounds for unity**. If we use the words doctrine, teaching, the faith once for all delivered, truth, the word of God, etc., we find that we must reach the same conclusion; namely, when we agree, when we are united, when we walk together, **we must obey His word, follow His teaching, be guided by the one faith, being governed by His word of truth**. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). The **only possible way** that this divine agreement can be reached is to "walk by the same rule... mind the same things" (Philippians 3:16). Since this is true, then there is a **contradiction of terms** when anyone (including some of our own brethren) says, "God brings or makes unity out of diversity." His word says

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the very opposite!

Oh, yes, where there is true Christianity and unity, there is always plenty of diversity or difference in the sense of opposition. We can all understand this when God's word plainly says, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). It is plain that when people are called out of a life which is diverse, different, and contradictory to the life of Christ, that these same people become different from their former life of worldliness and religious error.

We are all called by **one gospel, the one word and truth** (2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 John 9:11; Galatians 1:6-12; 1 Peter 1:22-25). Further, we know that the pleasing state of unity and fellowship with God and each other comes about only when we accept and obey His eternal truth (1 John 1:1-10; John 17:17-26; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). There is no possible way that we can walk along together in unity and diversity regarding revealed truth, all at the same time! This is a contradiction of terms, to say the least. This is most certainly not what Jesus prayed for in John 17. He prayed for unity, that we might all be united, as He and the Father are one. As Paul implies in 1 Corinthians 1:13, **Christ is not divided!** Neither can brethren be divided in doctrinal or moral matters, in name, teaching, or in practice, and be pleasing to God and have fellowship with Him and each other. A curse is placed on an angel, apostle, or any man

that would pervert or change Christ's gospel by adding to it, taking from it, or substituting anything for God's word (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19). God does not accept unity in diversity.

Man is to come out of that diverse, sinful, lost, hell-bound way of life, both doctrinally and morally. Then, and only then, is there unity. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What accord (harmony) hath Christ with Belial (Satan)? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel (unbeliever)? What agreement hath **the temple of God** (church) with idols?... Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate,** saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). To please and serve God, all men must come out of diversity, not promote unity in diversity; for this is truly a **contradiction of terms!**

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THE MAGNITUDE OF ETERNITY

by Joel Wheeler

One of the most sobering and thought provoking words in man's immense vocabulary is **eternity**. It is hard to image **eternity** because it deals with an unknown duration both backwards and forwards in timelessness. Man operates on a time schedule and without such, the world would be in constant chaos. Everything that we do in this life is by a time schedule, therefore **eternity** is difficult to understand because we are limited in our thinking. There is no way that we can fully understand what it means to have only a few hours to live until the doctor tells us to get our house in order. We will not fully understand **eternity** in this life but God has given us a "sense" of **eternity** (Eccl. 3:11 ASV).

The subject of **eternity** is of great importance because it is a predominant theme throughout the Bible. The word **eternity** is only mentioned once in the King James and only twice in the American Standard 1901, but the original word for **eternity** was translated 432 times as either **ever, everlasting, always, always, eternal, evermore or world** in the Bible. The original word appears a vast numbers of times making the

theme of eternity predominant. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand some things before we can prepare for it.

First we must understand that God is an eternal being. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place..." (Isa. 57:15). God has dwelt and dwells in every aspect of duration. Moses wrote "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psa. 90:2). It is hard to image something that has no beginning or ending. Many times the questions are asked "Where did God come from?" or, "Who made God?" The Bible offers no explanation for the existence of God but simply says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Creator existed before the creation and the eternal God of heaven does not need to explain his existence to created man. God is not dependent on anything outside Himself. Jesus said, "The Father hath life in Himself" (John 5:26). God is uncreated, unoriginated, having no beginning and no ending.

Second, we must understand that man is mortal on earth. Job said, "Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble, he cometh forth like a flower and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not..." (Job. 14:1). Flowers have their season and they bloom within that time frame. Man is like a flower in that he comes forth and blooms in life and then dies within his time frame. James wrote "because he is like the flower of grass he shall pass away" (James 1:10). God did not intend for earth to be man's eternal home. The things on this earth are temporal and are not designed to last. Men have always known that they would die and as time passes, we are reminded of how fragile and temporary our existence on this earth really is.

Third, we must know that death is just a doorway into eternity. Death is not the end of man, contrary to what others may say. "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). After death, we will stand before the Judge to answer for our deeds in this life, whether it is good or bad (II Cor. 5:10). It is only God's word that reveals to us that there is life after this one on earth (II Pet. 1:3). Man has searched for life after death with formulas and gadgets with no success. Man has searched the universe, probed the depths of the sea,

and split the atom to find life after death. All one needs to do is search the inspired word of God (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Peter, James and John witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus along with Moses and Elijah. Moses, the great lawgiver, had been dead and buried some 1,400 years before and Elijah, the great prophet of Israel, had been dead for 850 years. These men appearing with Jesus proved their souls lived after their physical bodies died.

Fourth, we must know that after death, man's habitation is eternal. The Bible clearly teaches that there are two dwelling places for the eternal part of man. One is designed for those whose names are written in the book of life and the other is for those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:15). Jesus said *"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into eternal life"* (Matt. 25:46). These two places are separated by "a great gulf" which is "fixed" (Lk. 16:26) and there is no crossing over from one side to the other. The habitation for the wicked is called "hell" and designed to punish those who are disobedient to the word of God. *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and the whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"* (Rev. 21:8). The fires of hell will burn and torment its residents forever and ever (Rev. 14:11). The habitation for the righteous is "heaven" and designed to reward those who remained faithful to God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (II Cor. 5:1). Heaven is that eternal city of God for all the faithful. *"For we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come"* (Heb. 13:11).

Eternity is forever and it is not bound by definition of time or duration. Eternity is like trying to find the end of a circle; there is not one. As sure as we are living on earth, we are headed to the judgment and into eternity. Jesus said *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation"* (Jno. 5:28, 29). One day, mankind will be called from the grave to answer for his deeds on earth. Each

person will answer for himself, which will determine his eternal destination.

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"BUT THEY'LL GET MAD!"

by Douglas Hoff

Generally speaking, there are only two reactions to truth. People will either accept it or reject it. The hard sayings are what really separate true believers from the unconverted. When Jesus taught that he is the bread of life many were offended at this (John 6:48-61). Jesus knew in himself that men would reject this because he knows what is in man (John 2:25; 6:61). What is sad is that many of his disciples "went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Suppose one of the disciples had cautioned Jesus not to teach these things. We can almost hear one saying, "But they'll get mad!" Would that have stopped the Lord from so speaking? No. The truth is what men need to hear, believe and obey to be saved (John 8:31, 32). Jesus loved us enough even to speak the hard sayings.

Man's reaction to truth says a lot about him. One who rejects the hard sayings is not truly converted to the Lord's way. Hear what the Bible says: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:5-7). When one accepts only the easy sayings of Jesus he is leaning on his own understanding.

Whoever rejects the hard sayings is headed for destruction because of his foolishness. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul" (Prov. 15:31, 32). He is like the son who would not be warned of the dangers of a loose woman. He cried out in misery "How have I hated instruction... and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers" (Prov. 5:12, 13).

Think about the person who advises another not to teach the "controversial" subjects of the Bible. When one says, "But they'll get mad," is this merely stating the obvious? Is it possible that such comments are urging an avoidance of "touchy" matters? If so, this amounts to not trusting the Lord with ALL one's heart.

Though Jesus' teaching was offensive to many that day, the apostles continued to walk with Jesus. Jesus tested their commitment by asking the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67). Peter's answer ought to characterize us as well: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68, 69). Though Peter later denied even knowing the Lord because of fear, he repented and returned to the only source of eternal life.

Let us also resolve to be true followers of ALL that Jesus taught. If we have trouble accepting the difficulties of the Christian life let us remember what Jesus endured for us on the cross. Then, call to mind the words of our Savior when he told us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). This is a hard saying for many people, but those who get mad and reject it will reject eternal life. Jesus became mankind's greatest friend by laying down his life for us. Should not we humbly submit to his commandments even if it means suffering "light affliction, which is but for a moment" (II Cor. 4:17)?

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THE BACKSLIDER'S HIT PARADE

TELL ME THE STORY OF JESUS – if it doesn't last too long.

TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE – yes, please let it be.

HAVE THINE OWN WAY, LORD – with Jim and Tom and Mary and Sue.

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY – but only in the church building on Sunday morning.

LEAD ME TO SOME SOUL TODAY – but wait until a convenient time.

EVER WILL I PRAY – is good for the preacher and elders, but I can do without it.

IF JESUS GOES WITH ME – it may be embarrassing for both of us.

I'LL NEVER FORSAKE MY LORD – unless it costs too much to follow Him.

GUIDE ME, O THOU GREAT JEHOVAH – unless it is somewhere I don't want to go.

–Selected

A WORD OF THANKS

Each month we receive a number of letters of praise for the paper and the work we are trying to do with it. Some include a contribution to help with the postage and production of the **Fulton County Gospel News**. While we do not ask for financial contributions from those on the mailing list, we naturally appreciate any gift large or small which helps us in this work. We want to say **A BIG THANK YOU** to all who write and encourage us in this work, whether you send a contribution or not. Of course, we offer a special thank you to those who can help with the work financially and do so. The Mammoth Spring Church of Christ has sacrificed tremendously over the years to keep **FCGN** going and is to be commended for its dedication to preaching the gospel through the printed page. In January the paper will begin its forty-second year. We are presently circulating about 8600 copies each month. We thank our readers, our financial supporters, our writers, and former editors for helping us in what we believe is a good work. Many of you obviously feel the same way about the **Fulton County Gospel News** and we **THANK YOU!**

Creativity is the art of taking a fresh clean look at old knowledge.

Truth, like oil in water, will finally come to the top.

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BOOK BLURBS

Recommended Reading

Baptism: New Birth Or Empty Ritual? is authored by Owen D. Olbricht and is an excellent treatment on this vital topic. The book is a 1994 release and is timely since it deals with some other current writings on baptism. We have recently seen a move toward making nearly all kinds of baptism for almost any reason acceptable. Brother Olbricht responds in a very kind manner to many of the erroneous concepts of another recent book entitled, **Rebaptism**, by brother Jimmy Allen, as well as remarks on the subject by others in and out of the church.

After discussing some of the matters involved in his own baptism (why he considered his baptism at 13 years old to be invalid), Owen briefly surveys various understandings about baptism. Following this are two chapters which discuss what God has expected from men as they performed the different religious rituals (ceremonies) in the Old and New Testaments. There is some excellent material here on faith and obedience. Next there are chapters which discuss John's baptism, Jesus being baptized, Christ's influence leading others to be baptized, Christ's teaching on baptism, Peter's teaching on baptism, the universal nature of baptism, and Paul's teaching on baptism. These sections have some in-depth treatments, but are easy to understand. The author uses an abundance of Scripture and proper hermeneutical approaches in presenting his material and drawing his conclusions. The book concludes with chapters on "Baptism That Qualifies," a consideration of the Holy Spirit and baptism, some final remarks and conclusions.

Some will not agree with brother Olbricht's use of the New American Standard Bible, nor with his view on the gift of the Holy Spirit, but these things are minor when compared with the overall excellence of the book and they do not detract from its purpose in demonstrating the proper role of baptism as essential in salvation. It is sad that some are resorting to old denominational arguments that belittle baptism's role in God's plan of salvation, but Owen forcefully meets these errors and offers some fresh insights into grace and obedience along the way. The book will help your understanding of baptism and assist you in helping others to accept the essential nature of Baptism.

The book is 171 information packed pages and sells for \$7.00, plus postage and handling. You may order from Owen D. Olbricht, 525 Pincus Ave., Northfield, NJ 08225. [Please do not send your orders for any books reviewed to the **Fulton County Gospel News** Address!]

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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