

# 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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## A PLEA FOR NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

### Part One - The New Testament Church

by Ted J. Clarke

#### INTRODUCTION

Is it possible for a church to be simply and only what the church in the New Testament was? Are denominational differences unimportant matters about which we can agree to disagree? Can a person believe and obey a denominational plan of salvation and be saved? Will a person who belongs to a denomination be saved eternally? These are questions to which the Bible gives definite answers, answers which may surprise some and anger others.

If you are determined to hold fast to what you presently believe, in spite of any Bible teaching to the contrary, you will not profit from this article. The only hope I may hold out for reaching you is that this article will make you angry enough that you will search in your Bible for answers to counter the teaching herein. While I do not believe that you will find Bible answers that contradict the Scriptures I will give, I promise that I will give diligent attention to any reply any of you care enough to submit.

However, if you believe **the Bible is final authority** for what one may believe, teach, and practice in religion, please read on and study each Scripture reference given. If book, chapter, and verse authority is given for each point, please accept the biblical teaching and obey the Bible in every matter shown to be God's Word. Accordingly, reject the doctrines and commandments of men which are denominational in origin (cf. Matthew 15:1-14).

#### THERE IS ONLY "ONE CHURCH"

When Jesus promised *"I will build my church"* (Matthew 16:18), He spoke of it in the singular, meaning He would only build **one** church. The word "church" is used in only two ways in the New Testament. First, it is used to speak of the universal church of which Christ is the Head (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23). Second, the word "church" is used to describe the local congregation(s) in a

given geographical area, such as *"the church of God which is at Corinth"* (1 Corinthians 1:2) or *"the churches of Galatia"* (Galatians 1:2). The word "church" is **never** used in a third sense to describe one or more religious denominations, as though they were part of the universal church Christ built. The use of manmade denominational names for the church of the Lord is not authorized in Scripture. One cannot read of the Baptist church, the Methodist church, the Seventh-Day Adventist church, the New Life church or any of the other hundreds of names invented by men to denominate their particular religious groups.

The church is often simply known as *"the church"* (Matthew 16:18; Acts 14:23). When origin and headship of the church is intended it is called *"the church of the Lord, church of God, churches of Christ [or] God"* (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 16:16). When one is referring to those who compose the church it is called *"the church of the Thessalonians, churches of the Gentiles, churches of the saints"* (1 Thessalonians 1:1; Romans 16:4; 1 Corinthians 14:33). You will note that there are **no instances** of the church being referred to by denominational names which are common today. In fact, the apostle Paul affirms that it is positively sinful for Christians to denominate themselves by such names (1 Corinthians 1:11-13). The one church which Jesus built will be identified by a Scriptural God-given name, not by one conceived by men. Of course, a religious group may identify itself by a Bible name and still not be the church Christ built, because it does not measure up to the other criteria for being the "one church."

#### THERE IS ONLY ONE STANDARD OF AUTHORITY FOR THE CHURCH

The New Testament church had only one standard of authority and that was the Word of God. The apostle Paul told the elders from the church at Ephesus

that he had preached unto them *"all the counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27) and stated, *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* (verse 32). The Lord rebuked the Jews because they *"made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition"* and said, *"But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matthew 15:6, 9). We cannot add to, subtract from, or modify God's Word with the words of uninspired men (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19). Since all Scripture is inspired of God and able to make us perfect (complete) and thoroughly furnished unto all good works, there is nothing that the doctrines and commandments of men can do for us, except lead us away from God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Mark 7:6-9, 13).

**The Bible only will make Christians only!** You cannot read in Scripture how one may become a Lutheran, a Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Jehovah's Witness or any of the other hundreds of religious groups. By simply taking the Bible alone you cannot become a member of any denominational religion. The uninspired creedbooks, manuals, catechisms, and disciplines are not needed to make people Christians, and most of the people who follow those manmade books admit such. But such books do make people members of denominations and detract from the need to be just Christians. One cannot find hyphenated-Christian groups in the Bible. You cannot read of Baptist-Christians nor Methodist-Christians, etc. Why? Because when they followed only the Bible they were simply and only Christians, followers only of Christ, not followers of John the Baptist or John Wesley or Martin Luther and Christ.

#### NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES PRACTICED THE SAME DOCTRINES

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth he rebuked their divisive practices and insisted on the following: *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all*

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**speaking the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"** (1 Corinthians 1:10). Paul taught the same thing in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17) and told them to teach others **the same things**. *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also"* (2 Timothy 2:2). Previous to this verse, Paul had told Timothy, *"Hold fast the form [pattern] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 1:13). The Lord's church will have no other standard of authority than the Spirit inspired Word of God. When one wants to know the truthfulness of a Christian doctrine, one will not look in the works of men, but in the Word of God. Some 80 times the Scripture says, **"It is written,"** leading people to turn to the Scripture for guidance in the truth of what is religiously right. Jesus, when being tempted by Satan, defeated the Devil by meeting each temptation with an **"It is written"** (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Does anyone really think that if the Lord returned to the earth today that He would quote as authoritative the Westminster Confession of Faith, the

Hiscox Baptist Manual, Luther's Catechism, etc.?

When writing on the unity of the faith in Ephesians, the apostle Paul said, **"There is one body [the church, 1:22-23], and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"** (Ephesians 4:1-6). For the church today to be patterned after the New Testament church, it must imitate the essential unity of the "ones" which Paul mentions here. Next month's article will show that each "one" can be identified from Scripture and followed by the true church of the Lord today.

**CONCLUSION**

In this article we have attempted at least a partial answer to the first question of our introduction, "Is it possible for a church to be simply and only what the church in the New Testament was?" If one understands that there is a need to be simply and only what the church in the New Testament was, we conclude that we can be. How? By looking for identifying marks of that church as found in the New Testament. One identifying feature is to use the word "church" as it is used in the New Testament, excluding any denominational application. If there were not hundreds of denominational names attached to the word "church," we would not have the confusion which exists when people talk about "my church denomination," etc. Also, if we hold steadfastly to the Bible as the **only standard** of authority for our religious beliefs, we will not combine the doctrines of men with God's Word. This will enable us to study the same book for the truths it teaches about God's will for us. If we faithfully apply the teachings of Scripture, we will all be practicing the same doctrines, following the pattern commanded by Christ and Paul (Matthew 4:1-11; 15:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2). In this way only can we know that we are indeed **the church Jesus built and died for** (Matthew 15:18; Ephesians 5:23, 25). [To be continued]

*"Going to church regularly is like making a path in the forest – the more often you use it, the less obstruction you'll find in the way."*

*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.*

**THE NEW AND IMPROVED MARY?**

by Jerry Bates

Just when you think that religious people cannot get any further from revealed truth, another event happens which shakes you back to reality. Recently I read that many Catholics were petitioning the Pope to proclaim a new dogma: "that the Virgin Mary is Co-Redemptrix, Meatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God" (*Newsweek*, August 25, 1997). This movement is supported by several prominent Catholics, such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who recently died. Of course, for centuries Catholics have elevated Mary to a position far higher than has been revealed in Scripture, but to proclaim her to be an equal with Jesus Christ himself is something else.

How could many sincerely religious people support such an idea? I believe that it can be answered very simply. Either people do not know the Bible or do not respect the simple written authority of the Bible. The author of the article made this very revealing statement:

*"The secret of Mary's mysterious power may be just this: having no history of her own, she entices every new generation to draw her portrait. The Bible offers only scraps to build on."* (Italics mine, J.B.)

In other words, it doesn't matter what the Bible says. It is not particularly important that the Bible says absolutely nothing about such a doctrine. It makes little difference that such a doctrine contradicts a plain teaching of Paul when he wrote: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Just forget that John warns us about going beyond the Word of God. "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God" (2 John 9, ASV). The crux of the matter is this: we like it; we want it; let's have it.

Of course, the only difference between this and many other religious doctrines is only one of degree. Denominational doctrines have no support from Scripture, but that doesn't stop men from believing them. Men have built great theological systems on scraps of nothing.

May we as God's people never take the Bible for granted. May we never be discontented with the simple authority of God's Word. Indeed, we would do well if we would heed the advice of Moses E.

Lard, a prominent Restoration leader, when in 1863 he encouraged men "to believe precisely what the Scriptures teach, to practice only what they enjoin, and to reject everything else."

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[Editor's Note: The latest **Catechism of the Catholic Church** says of Mary, "The Virgin Mary...is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer" (New York: Image Books - Doubleday, 1995, page 273). Jesus truly loved the mother of His fleshly body and honored her, but when a woman tried to elevate Mary's role in His birth beyond its God-given significance, Jesus focused on something more important. Notice Luke 11:27-28: "And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." Mary was a devout woman and blessed by God to be chosen to be the mother of Christ's fleshly body, but Christ was God from times eternal, before He ever came to earth to be God in the flesh (John 1:1, 14, 18). Furthermore, Jesus is specifically said to be our Advocate before God the Father (1 John 2:1-2).]

*What is intended as a little white lie often ends up as a double feature in Technicolor.*

*The giver always lives a richer life than the miser.*

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**BAPTISM IN 3-D**

by Allen Webster

**INTRODUCTION**

Baptism is a controversial subject. There is great diversity of opinion among religious groups about what baptism is, who is to be baptized, and why one should be baptized. Sometimes it helps in a disagreement to start over. Erase the memory banks. Look at the facts again. Examine all the evidence. Truth is never hurt by investigation. If one is right, then further study will bring him back to his first conclusion and fortify his faith. If he is wrong, then he needs to know so he can change and believe as God wants him to. Please examine these three "Ds" of baptism and see if this is not what the Bible teaches about baptism from Romans.

**BAPTISM IS FOR THE DEAD**

Baptism is for dead people, though not those in cemeteries. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, *that are dead to sin*, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1, 2). In the context, Paul is exhorting Christians to put away sin. His first argument is that baptized people are "dead to sin."

*Baptism is for those who are dead IN sin* (Isa. 59:1, 2; Eph. 2:1; Jn. 5:24, 25). The invitation to be baptized was issued only to sinners in the New Testament (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Those who are not guilty of sin are not to be baptized. The Bible teaches that all *mature* people are sinners (Rom. 3:23), but there are some who are not mature. Children and the mentally imbalanced are not sinners. None are accountable until they are old enough to know the difference between right and wrong.

Children may inherit houses, lands, genes, looks, and money from parents, but they cannot inherit sin. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. *The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father*, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezek. 18:20). Souls come from God, not parents, so they are initially as pure as their Sender (Heb. 12:9).

Furthermore, a person must know that he is a sinner before he can be baptized. New Testament examples of conversion show that they knew they were lost and in need of a Savior. Read the book of

Acts. A person is not qualified to be baptized who does not understand that baptism forgives his sins (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

*Baptism is for those who are dead TO sin* (Rom. 6:2) —that is, dead to the love and practice of sin. This happens when one is touched by the story of God's love and Christ's sacrifice (1 Jn. 4:19; 4:9; Rom. 5:8, 9; Jn. 3:16). Men who are dead to sin want to live righteously (1 Pet. 2:24). Breaking the hold of sin is done in three steps: (1) The love of sin is severed by faith in Christ; (2) The practice of sin is discontinued in repentance; and, (3) The guilty state of sin is removed in baptism.

Not just anyone is a candidate for baptism—*Only a dead person can be baptized!*

**BAPTISM IS A DOOR**

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were *baptized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3). We are baptized *into* the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26, 27). The Bible never says that we believe "into" Christ, repent "into" Christ, or confess "into" Christ. It does say we believe, repent, and confess "unto" Christ. They bring us nearer to Him, but only baptism is a door through which we may pass "into" His body (or church, Eph. 1:22, 23). It is important to enter here for every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Eph. 1:3, 4; 1 Jn. 5:11; Col. 1:14), including salvation (2 Tim. 2:10).

We are baptized into Christ's blood. Our text says that we are baptized "into his death" which means we are baptized into the benefits of His death—primarily the blood which was shed in His death (Jn. 19:34, 35). Blood washes away sins (Rev. 1:5) and sins are washed away in baptism. "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and *be baptized, and wash away thy sins*, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Therefore, it follows that the blood is contacted by baptism. It is the door into God's blessings.

**BAPTISM IS BY DESIGN**

"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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection...But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart

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Thank you. - Editor

(Continued from page 3)

that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:4, 5, 17). There is a clear design built into baptism which shows God's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:25).

Jesus died. Sinners die (discussed above). Jesus was buried. Sinners are buried. When the old person of sin dies, he must be put out of sight. Instead of a burial in the earth, he is covered with water. Sprinkling and pouring (as practiced by some religious groups) does not fit the design of baptism. These are not burials. Christ was not sprinkled with dirt. He was encased in a tomb.

Jesus was raised from the dead. Christians are raised. This occurs when they come forth out of the waters of baptism (Col. 3:10-17), and begin a new life. They are new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17).

Baptism is a beautiful operation of God (Col. 2:12). The Bible helps us to clearly see it in "3-D." Why not die to sin, pass through the door, and comply with the design?

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*Faults are thick where love is thin.*

**EXCUSES AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE SUNDAY EVENING WORSHIP SERVICE**

by Roelf L. Ruffner

It is a sad state of affairs when the attendance at the Sunday evening worship service is less than half what it is on Sunday morning. It reflects on the spirituality of some and the lack of spirituality in many. Below are some of the pathetic excuses given by "anti-Sunday evening" brethren and God's answers to those excuses.

**EXCUSE:** "I want to spend Sunday evening with my family."

**ANSWER:** Has your family become your idol? Jesus wants us to put Him before anything else in our life (Matt. 10:37).

**EXCUSE:** "I am really tired on Sunday night and this is the only time I get to relax."

**ANSWER:** What is so tiring about worshipping God and fellowshiping your brethren for an hour in an air conditioned building, sitting on padded pews? You will come away edified and refreshed. Besides, how tired was Jesus as he carried your cross to Calvary?

**EXCUSE:** "But the Bible doesn't say I have to attend on Sunday evening."

**ANSWER:** It is implied in the Holy Spirit's command to "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25). If God implies something, we must obey it. He also told us, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God..." (Matt. 6:33). Are you putting His kingdom first when you skip Sunday evening?

**EXCUSE:** "I have to drive a couple of miles to get to the building."

**ANSWER:** The Ethiopian had ridden hundreds of miles to worship Jehovah in Jerusalem (Acts 8:27).

Brethren, where would you rather be on Sunday evening? Your answer could betray a hardened heart and cause you to eventually lose your eternal reward. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13).

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**GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17**

- LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2).
- PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-23).

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