

IF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST SHOULD CLOSE (2)

There are people who wish the church of Christ would close its doors. But if the church of Christ should close who would teach what the Holy Spirit says about baptism?

Hello I am Larry Murdock. I preach for the church of Christ that meets at Gandy. Good morning and welcome to this program.

Baptism is a very important subject, not because I talk about it, but because God talks about it. Baptism is a Bible subject. In the New Testament we first read about baptism in connection with John, who was called the Baptizer. Why did John the Baptizer baptize people? Mark tells us in chapter 1, and verse 4. That verse says, "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Mark 1:4) The Contemporary English Version has an interesting translation of this verse. It reads, "So John the Baptist showed up in the desert and told everyone, "Turn back to God and be baptized! Then your sins will be forgiven." (Mark 1:4) John preached repentance and baptism for the remission/forgiveness of sins. "Remission" means "forgiveness." What is it that needs to be forgiven? Sin. What is necessary to receive forgiveness for sin? John preached two conditions: repentance and baptism. Did you know that John baptized repentant people for the forgiveness of their sins?

That same expression "for the remission of sins" is found in the apostle Peter's command on the birthday of Jesus' church. Peter and the other apostles preached the gospel of Christ just 10 days after Jesus ascended back to His father in heaven. Peter concluded his sermon by saying "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36) The people were convinced by the evidence that these apostles were telling the truth about Jesus. For instance, those apostles were speaking in the languages of the 17 different language groups gathered on that day. It was a miracle. So, many of the people believed this sermon that Jesus was the Christ the Lord. They asked the apostles "Brothers, what shall we do?" In answer to their question, Peter commanded them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins." (Acts 2:38) Notice that Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, not in the name of John. This was not John's baptism!

However there are similarities between John's baptism and the one commanded in the name of Christ. For instance, we find repentance and baptism is "for the remission of sins." Both John's preaching before Jesus' ministry and Peter's preaching, after Jesus' ascension, included repentance and baptism in water. Both John and Peter were showing people how to receive forgiveness. However, Repentance and Baptism do not manufacture forgiveness. Forgiveness of human sins was bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. And of course, his blood was shed on the Roman cross, the cruelest of all capital punishments.

The night of Jesus' betrayal, and the night before his crucifixion, "Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, **"Take, eat; this is my body."** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, **"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins."** (Matthew 26:26-28)

Jesus said that his blood was "for the remission of sins." So which is it? Is repentance and baptism for the remission of sins or is the blood of Jesus for the remission of sins? The scripture does not contradict itself. The Holy Spirit is always consistent and true interpretation of His inspired scripture is always in harmony with itself. Jesus' blood has paid for the remission of sins. Human repentance and baptism **receives** the remission that Jesus purchased. The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) God's church is Jesus' church and is composed of people who have been figuratively "washed in the blood of the lamb." (Revelation 1:7) Therefore, Paul could say that the church was purchased by the blood of Jesus. Those people had **received** this great forgiveness through the means of repentance and baptism.

When Jesus commissioned Saul of Tarsus to preach His gospel, Jesus said that he would deliver Paul from **"your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."** (Acts 26:18) Notice closely what Jesus said to Paul. Jesus sent Paul to the Gentiles "to open their eyes." How would Paul do that? He would do that by preaching (explaining) the gospel. The preaching of the gospel opens people's eyes. That phrase refers to people's understanding. Hearing and understanding the word about Christ, people can

now believe. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) When the eyes are open, then people can "turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." That is repentance. Repentance means to "turn." A person whose eyes are opened can turn back from sin and turn toward righteousness. It is a change in lifestyle. It is turning from darkness to light. It is turning away from the power of Satan and turning to the power of God. So we find here faith that comes by hearing the gospel, and we find repentance. But what then? When a person believes and repents he is ready to "receive forgiveness of sins." This is where baptism is commanded. Baptism is "for the (*reception of*) forgiveness of sins." **My baptism marks the day and the hour when I received the forgiveness purchased for me on the cross.** And so, when I arose from that watery grave I began my walk in "newness of life" as a Christian, even as described by the apostle in Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4) The transition (*our resurrection*) from a dead life to a new life takes place at baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. There is nothing magical about this, nor is it a blessing that I deserve. But it is like following any other command of God, there is a blessing that follows obedience, and that blessing is what Jesus died to give you: forgiveness! Sweet forgiveness!

Yes, Jesus taught Paul how people could "receive the forgiveness of sins" that Jesus purchased at the cross. But notice the next thing out of the mouth of Jesus in Acts 26:18: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins **and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**" When people receive Jesus' forgiveness they are saved. Jesus then places them among some other people. Jesus places the saved in the company of those other people who are "sanctified by faith" in Jesus. Friends, this whole process of hearing the eye-opening gospel, repentance and reception of the forgiveness is called being "sanctified by faith." The word sanctified means separation. That is, those who believed the eye-opening gospel, repented of their sins, and received the forgiveness through baptism were separated from sin, Satan, and the world. In fact, they were added to the church by the Lord himself. The church is Christ's sanctified people. This is what happened on the birthday of the church when the gospel was preached for the first time under the authority of Jesus' great commission.

Jesus' great command to his apostles was to "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

Peter and the other apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We read about this in Acts 2. These men began to speak in languages that they had never studied. It was a miracle. The crowd who gathered to hear them knew they were Galileans, and so they recognized the miracle. The crowd listened to the preaching. Many of them became convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Peter charged them that they had crucified the Messiah. Peter said, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." (Acts 2:23-24) Then Peter brought his sermon to a climax when he shouted, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36) "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:37-39)

Friends, is God calling you? God calls us through His Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you convinced that Jesus is God's Son who died once for the sins of the whole world? By accepting our penalty Jesus Christ justified God's forgiveness of people by his mercy. Because Jesus died for your sins God can be just and show you mercy at the same time.

If you believe this good news, then turn away from Satan and turn to God. Confess your faith in the presence of others who can then assist you in being baptized into Jesus Christ. You will be buried in that watery grave and raised from that watery grave in order to live in "newness of life." Your old life of sin will become as nothing. All things will be made new. Find a church of Christ near you. They can assist you in obeying the gospel. If the church of Christ should close its doors, then who would teach and preach the truth about baptism?