

Baptism: A “Church Ordinance”?

By Joe Slater

A congregation with which I once worked had an exhibit at which we gave away gospel tracts during a three-day community event. Our tract on the new birth caught a gentleman’s attention. “Isn’t this teaching that baptism is necessary for salvation?” he asked. I agreed that the tract so taught and affirmed that the Bible taught this as well. A rather spirited discussion ensued, to say the least.

Among the many objections he offered was that baptism was just a “church ordinance.” I asked him to show me where the Bible said that. Of course, he made no attempt to do so. Biblically there is no such thing as a “church ordinance.” Ordinance is merely another word for law. The church is not in the law-making business. There is but one law giver. (James 4:12.)

Sometimes even brethren carelessly call baptism and the Lord’s Supper “church ordinances” (or, worse

yet, “sacraments”). Both expressions are foreign to Scripture.

Rather than the church making laws, Christians have pledged themselves to obey the law of Christ. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are two of many things commanded by Jesus, so technically they might be called ordinances of Christ; but He commanded many other things as well.

Sacraments, on the other hand, are purely the invention of men. Nobody ever heard of “sacraments” connected with the church for over a thousand years after its beginning.

Unwilling to surrender his point, my visitor re-phrased his argument: “Baptism is just a command; it has nothing to do with salvation.” Evidently, he didn’t stop to think that faith is also commanded (Acts 16:31); repentance is also a command. (Acts 17:30.) Yet my opponent believed both of those things were necessary for

salvation! Indeed, Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9.)

— Justin, TX

“There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.” (1 Peter 3:21,22.)

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit . . . Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.’” (Acts 2:38,41.)

LESSONS FROM OUR LORD’S TEMPTATION

By Milton Smith

One of the most amazing incidents recorded in the Bible is the story of the temptation of the Son of God by the prince of “spiritual wickedness in the high places.” Each of the synoptic gospels record this incident. We must consider that what took place on this occasion was Satan engaging himself in an assault on the incarnate Son of God. Among the adversaries of Jesus, none could equal the power of Satan. If our Lord was able to triumph over the spiritual assaults of the prince of this world, he truly was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and the Holy One who has the authority to rescue all sinners from the kingdom of darkness.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil for 40 days. (Luke 4:2.) This would be the ultimate assault on Christ by the wicked powers of darkness. This area the Bible identifies as the “wilderness,” was often called the “devastation.” It is a very frightening area east of Jerusalem

that was entered by traveling down the back slopes of the plateau on which Jerusalem rose over the Dead Sea. It was an area consisting pretty much of nothing but rocks, jagged cliffs, and devastation. It was a most frightening trip. Jesus found Himself all alone in this dreaded wilderness when Satan came to Him. Here, in this intimidating wasteland, Jesus would be confronted by a subtle, crafty, and clever deceiver. Satan’s temptation would be masterfully designed to attack Jesus with the greatest amount of impact. Everything about this situation would be dangerous.

Jesus overcame every obstacle and every temptation that this evil deceiver would throw at him. But what does this mean to us? Basically, three important facts: First, Jesus satisfied the Father’s demand for the perfect sacrifice by his victory over the tempter. Second, Jesus became the perfect mediator between God and man by being “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”

(Hebrews 4:15.) And third, in turning back Satan by quoting Scripture, Jesus was showing us how to overcome Satan’s temptations by using the Bible. Satan hates the word of God, and when we use it, he is more likely to flee from us and center his attacks on someone else. The temptation of Jesus was truly an amazing incident, and one that teaches the student of the Bible some magnificent lessons. - Tulsa, OK

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15,16.)

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

A STORY TO INSPIRE

By Flavil Nichols

During the War Between the States a young woman learned the truth and obeyed the gospel. Her sweetheart, J. H. Halbrook, was a confederate soldier. He was captured by the Union Army and kept a prisoner in Michigan until the war was over. He was then given a ticket to Nashville and \$2.50. From there he returned to Centerville, Tennessee, found what was left of his home and family, and was reunited with his girlfriend. Then, they were married.

Mr. Halbrook’s new wife studied the Bible with him and he soon became a Christian. He thought the truth was so good and so simple that he began to teach and baptize many of his friends and neighbors. Then he began to preach, but he recognized his need for more training, so he enrolled in Mars Hill Bible School and was taught and trained by

T. B. Larimore.

Upon completing his studies at Mars Hill, Mr. Halbrook and his wife chose to move farther south rather than going back to Tennessee, and they went into the counties of Walker, Marion, Fayette and Lamar counties in Alabama. Among his many converts were Charley Alexander Wheeler and his wife. Mr. Wheeler, after obeying the gospel, soon began preaching to others. He started more than 100 congregations and baptized more than 6000 people.

But wait! The story does not end there! One of those 6000 baptisms was my father, the late Gus Nichols. And under my father’s preaching 12,000 people were converted to Christ! And how many of those 12,000 began to preach “the glorious gospel of Christ?” No one can know the exact number, but I personally know several who did.

I am one whom he baptized and encouraged to preach. And under my preaching about 3000 have been baptized. Among that number a few have gone on to preach the gospel.

Only eternity will reveal the total results of the teaching of that one girl over 150 years ago. But at least 21,000 people have already become Christians through this single thread in the fabric of her influence.

“Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37), for you are important! Just one can be very influential.

— DECEASED

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Matthew 5:13.)

WHAT DID JESUS FINISH?

By Richard Dent

“So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30.) What was finished? May I suggest the following things that were completed.

Many Old Testament prophecies were made concerning the life of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Prophecies such as where He would be born and how He would suffer for the sins of the world are found. See Micah 5:2. Isaiah 53 is one of the most prophetic of all chapters about Jesus. The last verse of chapter 53 states that Jesus “was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” When Jesus died on the cross he completed the Old Testament prophecies that foretold His death.

When Jesus died on the cross He completed the final conclusion of the Old Law. The Mosaic Law had served its purpose as our schoolmaster to bring us into the Christian dispensation. “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:24-27.) Under the Old Law such things as animal sacrifices were offered in the temple and the Sabbath Day was observed. Today, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to our Lord (Romans 12:1) and the Lord’s church meets on the first day of the week to worship Him. (Acts 20:7.) Some religions want to cling to portions of the old Mosaic Law in their thinking today, but the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote, “Now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” (Hebrews 8:6.) “For if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for the second. . . He has made the first obsolete.” (Hebrews 8:7,13.) We now live and serve God in this Christian age of time. No animal blood need be shed. Jesus is our supreme sacrifice.

Last, when Jesus uttered the words, “It is finished,” He meant that His earthly journey was over. Yes, He died but was resurrected to appear before His disciples again before ascending into Heaven. Read Acts 1:9-11. You and I will one day pass on from this life but only our physical body will decay. Our spiritual soul will not die. We must some day face Judgment. (Hebrews 9:27.) Brothers and Sisters, be thankful that death cannot cause us to be finished forever. May our souls live on with God in eternity.

— Liberal, KS

GOD'S REALITY VERSUS MAN'S IMAGINARY

By Dalton Key

We still sing the words. But I wonder if they mean to us what they used to. "O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made."

Awesome wonder is becoming a scarce commodity these days. Slick, synthetic, digitally-enhanced imitations of God's power are too often preferred over the real thing.

Divine fact is devalued while human fiction continues to sell at a premium! Moses and Daniel have been replaced by Iron Man and Captain America!

The Creation account once thrilled and amazed those eager souls who heard it. The miraculous stories of Scripture once filled hearts with wonder. But now? The Bible's fact-based miracles, absent the special effects and CGI wonders of Hollywood, are made to appear almost lifeless when pitted against the media's imaginary, mock miracles.

We are in desperate need of a long-overdue reality check!

A single Bible story told in Bible Class on Sunday morning has little hope of competing for the heart of a wide-eyed child against a relentless, daily dose of super-powered super heroes. I still remember well the question put to me some years ago by my then-five-year-old son: "Daddy, can God do everything Superman can do?"

The problem has only gotten "more so" in the decades since. God's reality has been given a backseat to man's imaginary. But never forget: the real will always outlast the imaginary. Truth will always win out over time.

This brings to mind a contest of sorts conducted in an Egyptian court back in the days of Moses. Pharaoh's sorcerers feebly attempted to imitate God's miracle of transforming a rod into a serpent. By some means the magicians pulled off a parlor trick, mimicking the marvel. They no doubt considered, at least for the moment, the powers of Pharaoh as greater than the power of God. But smugness soon turned to wonder as Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the sorcerers. God was shown to be the true and the only God and the true and only source of genuine miraculous might.

Men may mimic God but they will never match Him. We must never, ever forget this.

When the TV shows have been cancelled and the movies and comic books have long been forgotten the God of heaven will live on. The heavens will still declare His glory. There will always and forever be but one I AM!

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

A PLEA FOR SPIRITUAL STATESMEN

By Dalton Key

If you are anything like me, you are getting fed up with everything (and I mean everything!) in our society being presented through the lens of politics.

We've been hearing it for several years and from both major political parties: "This is not the time for partisan politics!"

Sadly, the words are rarely heeded.

Government and governance have become little more than team sport activities.

Politicians seldom rise above the perspectives and concerns of their own party, in contrast to statesmen who have the good of their country at heart. Politicians serve the interest of their party, uphold the party's platform, and are fueled by party spirit and loyalty. Statesmen owe their allegiance to a higher, nobler cause. Their concern for truth and justice, right and reason, overshadow any desires to please or placate their party.

Sadly, politicians seem to be under every rock and behind every bush, while true statesmen are a rare breed in any generation.

Henry Clay was a true statesman. In 1839, from the floor of the Senate, Clay uttered the historic words, "I had rather be right than president." At the time, he was considered a front-runner for the presidency. When taking an unpopular stand, he was warned, "Mr. Clay, if you maintain that position, you'll never be president," to which he gave the famous reply which probably cost him the White House. Chiseled on his headstone are the words: "I'd rather be right than president." We need more men today like Clay, who put principles ahead of party.

The same is true within the realm of religion. There is never a good time for partisan religious politics! We must be big enough and mature enough to rise above any and all man-made parties, factions, denominations, sects or splinter groups. We owe our allegiance to no man, no party, no school, no paper. We belong exclusively to our Lord and Master and to His blood-bought body. Having denied self, and having taken up his cross, we must doggedly follow Him - and Him alone. (Matthew 16:24.)

Men-pleasers never please the Lord and seldom please men; they are quick in jumping on the latest, faddish, party-oriented band wagon, while just as quickly hopping off when something new or more popular parades by. Religious politicians who timidly check the wind's direction before taking a stand on a vital issue lose both respect and self-respect. Lining up with "Brother So-And-So" or with this school or with that paper or lectureship should never come before lining up with the inspired Word of God!

The cause for which we live, for which we labor, is of more importance than any religious party, be it a denominational body, a faction within a congregation, or a splinter group within the brotherhood. The religious world is already plagued with plenty of politicians; needed are more spiritual statesmen!



WHAT CAN WASH AWAY SINS?

By Danny Tunnell

"Nothing but the blood of Jesus!" "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Revelation 1:5.)

Some find the word "blood" offensive and want to remove it from their hymns, but "there is power in the blood."

A Christian may say, "Thank God my sins are covered." Perhaps they are thinking about Romans 4:7, where Paul quotes David: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." But to say that sins are covered today is not saying enough. Jesus doesn't just "cover" a Christian's sins, He washes them away. His blood is superior to the animal blood used for atonement (covering) in the Old Testament. His blood doesn't just cover sin, it cleanses from all unrighteousness. (Hebrews 9:14; 10:17.)

When God forgives our sins, He forgets them. "Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12.) God said in Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am He that blots out

your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins."

This shows the love of God; He forgives our sins for His own sake! Any parent who loves his kids wants to do good stuff for them. God wants to bless His children. How many good parents want to remember bad things about their own children? Our heavenly Father is the same way!

When God forgives, He doesn't say, "I'm putting this in your file, where it still exists and I can look it up later." People may do that but God doesn't.

It doesn't matter what we feel, or what a neighbor says about it. God says, "I will forgive and will forget it." That includes all past sins: adultery, fornication, drunkenness, murder, lying, theft, drug abuse . . . whatever it is.

Why would God do that? Because He delights in mercy. (Micah 7:18.)

A fellow was describing a vacation cabin he used to own in the Rocky Mountains. He fondly talked about the cabin, the little bridge he crossed

driving up to it, the steep driveway, the mudroom at the entrance, the living room and kitchen, and the mountain he could see out the window. He remembers it perfectly, but the cabin doesn't exist anymore now except in his own mind, in his memories. The people he sold it to bulldozed it to the ground. They built another house there.

As the cabin exists today only in this man's memory, our sins that God has forgiven exist only in our memories as well. If God doesn't remember them, why should we bring them up? Why waste time thinking about something that doesn't exist anymore? Those sins have been cast into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19.)

God doesn't remember forgiven sin. He has wiped them out of His mind. In His eyes you are as innocent as a newborn baby. A line from a Bill Gaither song comes to mind, "He forgot the foolish child I used to be."

— Miami, OK

THE POWER OF OUR DECISIONS

By Glen Walton

Decisions have tremendous implications for our lives. I read somewhere of a young man who was planning a medical career who had to make a decision one evening about studying or attending a ball game. He attended the game and the next day made a low grade on the test. It so happened that the low grade kept him out of medical school, and made it necessary for him to change his plans for the future.

At times, what seems to be an innocent choice is fraught with grave consequences.

A man named Lot once made what seemed to be an innocent choice. Strife arose between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of his kinsman, Abram. In order to avoid even more serious problems, Abram thought it best for them to separate, but gave Lot the privilege of choosing whatever land he desired. Lot chose the plain of Jordan and journeyed east. He "pitched his tent toward Sodom." (Genesis 13:12.) What seemingly was an innocent choice led to disaster. In

Sodom his righteous soul was vexed, and he lost a part of his family. Even in fleeing the tragedy continued. His wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Afterward, his daughters, contaminated by the immorality of that wicked place, made their father drunk and conceived children by him. Moses, in Genesis 18-19, shows us the real ugliness of this innocent but unwise decision.

But there are better examples in the book of God. "By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Hebrews 11:24,25.) Moses chose God and His people, and became God's great leader and lawgiver. As long as the world stands, his influence for good will abide.

May God bless us in our decisions. These are very important to the worth of our own lives and the lives of those around us. Undergirded by good moral principles, and with our attention

focused on things eternal, we can make decisions which are sound and good.

— Amarillo, TX

"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18.)

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