



ISSUE

25.8

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

“New Creation”

By Kyle Pope

Often, whenever a child is born the event is so moving it affects many who hear about it far beyond just those related to the child. The knowledge of a new life can regenerate even the most bitter and cynical heart. There is something about a new birth that reminds us of our own days of youth and innocence. This is true not only of physical birth, but spiritual birth as well. It is a joyous thing when a sinner turns from the darkness of sin, putting faith in Christ, to have his or her sins washed away in baptism by the blood of Christ. Sometimes brethren who may have felt discouraged or downhearted can have their spirits lifted by seeing a new soul brought to the Lord. The encouragement and innocence of a new life in Christ can cause the gloom and darkness of burdens we carry to fade far from view. Recently, we have shared this joy witnessing two souls turn in obedience to Christ. With this in mind, let's consider a few questions about such times of spiritual birth.

I. What Really Happens? Those who witness a person being baptized into Christ know well enough what can be seen with the eyes. The person repents of past sins (Acts 3:19). In the presence of those around the person confession is made of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (Rom. 10:8-10). This culminates in immersion in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Yet, beyond what the eyes can see the Bible teaches that some other very important things happen spiritually. Paul told the Ephesians that apart from the grace of God that comes through Christ all accountable souls are dead in a spiritual sense. Because of God's

love, **“even when we were dead in trespasses”** through obedience to the gospel He **“made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved”** (Eph. 2:5, NKJV). This grace is not extended to us because of our works of merit. Paul affirms it is, **“not of works lest anyone should boast”** (Eph. 2:9). It is Christ’s blood that merits salvation. When a sinner turns to Christ in obedience to the gospel, the mercy and grace of God revives them spiritually. The soul spiritually dead and separated from God because of sin, lives again in a reconciled relationship to God. Paul told the Corinthians **“all things are of God who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ”** (2 Cor. 5:18).

Another important thing also happens. Paul taught the Christians in Galatia, **“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** (Gal. 3:26-27). In baptism a person does not join some denomination, instead he or she *puts on* Christ. There are several ways in which this may be understood. First, through baptism we are said to be united with Christ in His death and resur-

rection. Paul explained to the Colossians that we are **“buried with Him in baptism, in which you were raised with Him through faith in the working of God”** (Colossians 2:12). He told the Romans, that in baptism we have been **“united together in the likeness of His death”** granting us hope that one day we may be *untied together* **“in the likeness of His resurrection”** (Rom. 6:5). Second, we put on Christ in the relationship we share with others who are in Christ. After the preaching on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit tells us **“those who gladly received his word were baptized”** resulting in the fact that **“about three thousand souls were added to them”** (Acts 2:41). These disciples, are identified as **“the church”** in the verses that follow (Acts 2:47, KJV, NKJV; 5:11; 8:1). In the New Testament the *church* is identified as Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23). When one is baptized into Christ, the Lord adds him or her to that group identified as Christ’s body in this world, which must be understood as another sense in which the new convert is said to *put on* Christ.

Another change unseen to the eyes that takes place in obedience to the gospel concerns the soul. Peter spoke of Christians having **“purified your souls in obeying the truth”** (1 Pet. 1:22). He described this as one being **“born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible”** (1 Pet. 1:23). A soul who turns to Jesus Christ in true faith and obedience not only dies, but is spiritually reborn unto a new life. Paul, once again in speaking of baptism explains that in it **“our old man was crucified with Him”** (i.e. Christ) **“that the body of sin might be done away with”** (Rom. 6:6). When the old self is *done away with*, a new life begins. Paul told the Corinthians, **“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new”** (2 Cor. 5:17). No matter what may have plagued our life in the past, the new convert has the promise that in conversion to Christ **“all things have become new.”**

II. When Is This Fully Realized? Our world thrives on trying to change things. We either want to redefine things that have been clearly revealed, or consider something complete when it is only partially fulfilled. So it is with spiritual birth. Millions of souls have been convinced that this **“new creation”** is complete at a stage long before *the babe has come out of the womb* (so to speak). In physical birth life begins at conception, but a child is not said to have been *born* until it opens the womb, the cord is cut, and the baby boy or girl starts to breathe on its own. We would find it strange indeed if a

mother and father spoke of a child still growing in the womb as if it had already been born. In Paul's words to the Galatians he did not stop with the words, "**you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**"—he went on to describe when they became *sons of God*—"**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ**" (Galatians 3:26-27). Paul himself was not *born again* when he first spoke of Jesus as "**Lord**" (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15), but after Ananias told him, "**arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord**" (Acts 22:16).

This is not to say that our world does not go through the motions of things it calls *baptism*. Our world immerses babies long before they are even capable of belief. Jesus said "**he who believes and is baptized with be saved**" (Mark 16:16). Our world sprinkles or pours infants and adults and calls it *baptism*. When both Jesus and the Ethiopian eunuch were baptized they went down into the water and came up out of the water (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:9-10; Acts 8:38-39). New Testament baptism was always a complete immersion. Still others in our world are baptized long after they are told by religious leaders that they are "saved" in order to join a denomination, or as "an act of obedience." The Bible teaches that baptism is part of salvation. Peter said clearly, "**baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ**" (1 Peter 3:21, NASB). New Testament baptism was not to join a denomination, and baptism for a purpose not taught in the New Testament is not *obedience*.

So what must one do if he or she has faith but was not baptized into Christ? What must one do if he or she was baptized but at the wrong time, for the wrong reason, or in an unscriptural manner? Thankfully, the New Testament addresses this very problem. When Paul came to Ephesus he encountered some who had followed John the Baptist. John had prepared the Jews for the coming of Jesus. The disciples Paul met in Ephesus didn't yet know about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul explained to them, "**John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in Him who would come after him, that**

is on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4a). These disciples had been baptized, but not into Christ (Acts 19:3). So what were they to do? The Holy Spirit tells us, "**when they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**" (Acts 19:4b). One must be baptized for the right reason, and at the proper stage of accountability to be born again into Christ.

III. What Happens Next?

Far too often, even within the church, it may be that brethren work hard to baptize a soul into Christ, then we leave the new convert like a fish floundering on the shore. A new convert must grow and be encouraged. Simply dunking a person in water means nothing if he or she does not continue to "**grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord**" (2 Pet. 3:18). Peter speaks of new Christians as "**new born babes**" who should "**desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby**" (1 Pet. 2:2). Being a Christian involves a process of maturity. Peter lays out a good blueprint for this process of maturation in his second epistle. He speaks of building upon one's faith *knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love* (2 Peter 1:5-7), warning that if we fail to do this we are "**shortsighted, even to blind-**

ness” having forgotten that we were purged from old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). The Hebrew writer speaks of this as growing in order to have our **“senses exercised to discern both good and evil”** (Heb. 5:14).

Beyond just remembering the importance of growth we must also keep in mind the danger of falling. As appealing as it might be to believe that once a person obeys the truth he or she is eternally secure, the Bible does not teach that. Yes, if we remain within the grace of God by walking in the light (1 John 1:7) and appealing to Him for forgiveness when we sin (1 John 1:9) God will forgive. If we, however, choose to reject His grace and return to the world there are some fearful warnings that are given to us. The Hebrew writer warns, **“If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”** (Heb. 10:26). Such a person has **“trampled the Son of God**

underfoot” and **“counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and insulted the Spirit of grace”** (Heb.10:29). Christians who would do this **“crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame”** (Heb. 6:6). The new convert is reconciled to God, but he must remain faithful to the Lord to continue in this relationship.

Finally, although the babe in Christ must grow and remain faithful, Christians can always have the assurance that they are never alone. Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them until the very **“end of the age”** (Matt. 28:20). For the believer, there is the promise of peace and comfort from God through prayer (Phil. 4:6-7). Paul spoke to the Romans of the comfort we receive from the Scriptures as we look to its examples and instructions (Rom. 15:4). But also, the fellowship we share with those of common faith is one way God offers helps us. The Hebrew writer urges us, **“Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some,. But exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”** (Heb.10:24-25). May we who are Christians strive to remember who we are in Christ, what truly happened in our conversion, and what that challenges us to be from this point forward, looking unto the goal of our faith—an eternal home in heaven with God.



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