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Church of Christ
371 W. Main Street
Greenwood, IN 46142
(317)888-8288

www.churchofchristatgreenwood.org

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Jesus: The Way Out of Confusion

By David Hartsell

The religious world is filled with ideas and faiths. Different "holy books" offer differing standards by which people should live. Some worship one god; others worship many deities. Some emphasize the deity "inside of each of us." Multiplicities of religious beliefs are extremely confusing. Even in the "Christian faith" there are conflicting denominational ideas that often leave our heads spinning. How do we find our way out of this malaise and back on the path toward God?

The answer is found in Jesus' life and teachings. In the first century, great religious divisions existed among God's people. Greek and Roman influences lay behind many of these differences. Alexander the Great had spread Hellenistic customs, practices, and religions over the world. Later, reaction to Rome's rule and its religions

caused the Jews to splinter further in their unity of faith. Many Jewish sects developed. Sadducees were willing to compromise some of God's teachings to save the temple and keep their position. They claimed to believe the scriptures but denied that a spiritual realm existed and, therefore, discounted the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees were opposed to spiritual compromise. Originally, they were determined to carefully keep God's Word. This effort eventually turned into the exaltation of human ideas and traditions – exalting them even above God's revealed Will. Jesus was hounded by Pharisees His entire life. Other groups such as the Zealots, the Publicans, and the Herodians had political agendas as well as religious disagreements. The Essenes avoided it all by withdrawing from society and formed smaller religious communities. Confusion reigned!

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How did Jesus deal with all these differences? First, there are several things that He did not do. He did not throw up His hands and say, "I give up! There are so many contradictory concepts. Why should I try?" Secondly, He never implied that truth was not essential. He did not suggest that one idea is as good as another. Finally, though Jesus believed truths found in each of the groups we have mentioned, He refused to join any of them.

Jesus continuously meditated on God's Word. A twelve year old Jesus discussed scripture with Jewish religious scholars. (Lk.2:45-47) Years later, He astounded formally trained Jews with His knowledge of God's Law and His ability to properly use it. Jesus told them plainly, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me." (Jn.7:15-16) While denouncing the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees, our Lord emphasized the necessity of listening to and obeying the Word of God that they taught. (Matt.23:2-3) Like Jesus, we can make our way through the numerous false and confusing ideas by holding to God's Word, the Bible. **We can help our family and friends by teaching them to do the same.**

Bible Baptism

By Foy E. Wallace
(Bible Banner – 1948)

The basic principle of all obedience is understanding "He that heareth the word and understands it" - Matt. 13:23. "Go preach the gospel—he that believeth (the gospel) and is baptized shall be saved" - Mark 16:15-16. Believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is not all that must be understood in rendering obedience in baptism—there are other essential principles of a gospel faith.

Institutions with design carry the necessity of understanding the design. Example: The Lord's Supper—"Do this in memory of me." No man can observe the Lord's Supper "in memory" of Christ without knowing it. The proposition "for" in Acts 2:38 is "EIS" in the original, and the proposition "in" of 1 Cor. 11:23 is the same "EIS" in the original. No man can take the Lord's Supper in order to, unto or into, the memory of Christ if he does not know it, and for the same reason no man can be baptized in order to, unto or into the remission of sins or salvation, if he does not know it. One cannot accidentally obey God.

If it is not necessary to understand the purpose of baptism, why is it in every case emphasized from the preaching of John to the last verse on the subject in the New

Testament? If it is not to be understood, then, that part of the subject is non-essential and when we preach the design of baptism we are preaching something not necessary to be believed, therefore, preaching a non-essential. Why debate with a Baptist preacher on the design of baptism if its design does not have to be believed or understood? Why debate on a non-essential?

Is there a single case in all the New Testament where the person baptized did not understand the purpose of the act?

It is sometimes said that the purpose is not a part of the command. Let us see:

Acts 22:16 - "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins." The subject understood is you—with the triple predicate—and fully rendered with each part supplied it reads: You arise and be baptized and you wash away your sins. Arise is part of the command; be baptized is a part of the command; wash away your sins is part of the command. No man can do that who believes his sins have already been washed away.

It is said that "to obey God" is the main purpose of baptism. Then why is that purpose never stated? Is it not singular that the New Testament failed to mention the main purpose in connection with the command, but on the other hand emphasized the non-essential purpose, or the

purpose not necessary to be believed? "Remission of sins", "into Christ", "shall be saved," "newness of life," and all other expressions are just one design stated in different ways. Baptism has only one design. Alexander Campbell established this premise, and lays it down in that very proposition, in his book on "Baptism." I mention this because so many refer to Campbell on the subject.

We are sometimes asked: If it is necessary to believe that baptism is for the remission of sins then should we not make it a part of the confession and ask every one "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and do you also believe that baptism is for the remission of sins?" This is dodging the issue. Try it on the other contention. If the main purpose is "to obey God," then, the argument would require that it also be made a part of the confession: "Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and are you being baptized to obey God?" It's a poor rule that will not work both ways. As a matter of fact, all sincere people in religion perform every act of religious service with the general motive to obey God. Baptism has a very specific purpose—just as does the Lord's Supper—and the general idea that it is a command, but not essential to salvation or that it is a duty but the duty of one already saved is a perversion of Bible teaching. If one can be scripturally

baptized with such a belief then all our preaching on the subject is inconsistent.

To say that a man can believe that he is saved before he is baptized, and then be baptized to be saved, is to argue that what a man believes has nothing to do with what he does.

It is frequently said that if one is satisfied we have no right to question them. Why should we hold an inquest? Paul evidently "held an inquest" over the twelve in **Acts 19**. True, the same thing may not be wrong in the case before us—but something was wrong there and something else just as vital may be wrong now. Satisfaction is not salvation. Apply the argument to other things people believe and do in religion and where would it lead to? If it can be applied to baptism why not to everything else?

It takes more than the right act to constitute valid baptism. The right act based on the right belief: Error preached, error heard, error believed, is error obeyed. Truth preached, truth heard, truth believed, is truth obeyed.

Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." This cannot be made to mean "You may believe error but if in your error your aim is to obey God, then your error will make you free, anyway." Such apologizing for denominational error cannot advance the truth. It is much easier

to teach people to obey the gospel than to defend them in their error.

"Our families, our fellow employees and our communities need to know about Jesus and how to be saved – can they depend on us to assist them in this need?"