

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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THAT THEY MAY ALL BE ONE

by Barry O'Dell

In his comments on the Lord's prayer as recorded in John 17, brother Guy N. Woods wrote the following on John 17:20-21,

“When men come to respect God's word as they ought agreement on the basis of its teaching is easy; but, it will never be possible to unite on the doctrines and commandments of men. Creeds, confessions of faith, church manuals constitute a perpetual barrier to the unity of religious people. The spirit of this prayer is wholly foreign to the factious spirit which often characterizes members of the church; and those who promote parties, factions, and divisions in the Lord's body are guilty of grievous sin (1 Cor. 1:10).¹

In an attempt to justify the many denominational bodies in existence it is said that it is a blessing that there are so many different “options” from which to choose in religion. Many believe that because we are all different (young and old, black and white) there is no possible way that we can all be one. The young need contemporary services, while the old need a traditional setting. Racial differences require more options because, “we are just too different.” Does man need a variety of choices in worship due to his age or race? Is it possible to achieve the unity for which Christ prayed?

The Prayer

Jesus prayed to the Father, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (Jn. 17:20-21). Notice the following:

1. **The Source of Faith and Unity (v. 20).** It is the Word of God alone by which faith comes (Rom. 10:17) and through which unity is accomplished. Isaiah wrote, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). As brother Woods noted in his commentary, the doctrines and creeds of men serve only to bring about division and parties, even within the Lord's church. The inspired word of God is the only source of absolute, objective truth (Jn. 17:17). Was Jesus praying for the impossible? Do the differences of age, race, environment, etc., make His prayer null and void? Absolutely not! Christians today are those who believe on Jesus through their (the apostles) word. Paul commanded, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ, that ye all speak 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 Cor. 1:10). The division that existed within the church at Corinth was based on Christians who were more devoted to men than to Christ (1 Cor. 1:11-12). Paul's energy was spent in preaching Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). This must be the determination of every servant of God today.

2. **The Subjects of Unity (v. 21).** Christ prayed that ALL believers be one. This excludes no one! It may seem impossible to the world, but unity among all believers is possible. Consider Paul's instructions on accomplishing this command. Unity among all believers is accomplished by possessing the proper attitudes. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness (gentleness, NKJV), with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). Sadly, there are some in the body of Christ who do not possess these attributes. However, attitude is but one area by which unity is accomplished. One must hold to the correct doctrine in order to

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BY LOVE**SERVE ONE ANOTHER***Bobby Liddell*

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). Christians have been called unto liberty (freedom, ASV) by hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ (John 8:32; 2 The. 2:14), and, by so doing, are free from the bondage of sin. This freedom begins when we make the deliberate determination to be free from the practice of sin by repentance, free from the guilt of sin by obedience in order to have our sins washed away (Acts 22:16), and free from the eternal consequences which would have resulted had we continued in sin (Rom. 6:23). Paul cautions Christians not to use their “freedom for an occasion to the flesh.” Salvation in Christ does not give us the right to live as we choose, but

does give us the right (and responsibility) to live as Christians (Rom. 6:16-18).

Christians are free to serve.

“By love serve one another.” A number of characteristics should manifest themselves in our lives because of our changed hearts. The first, love, signifies our benevolent and sacrificial love for one another. The second, willingness to serve, flows from the first. While love for one another tests the depth of our relationship in Christ, service tests its length. When one truly is ready and willing to serve his brothers, he will consider it an opportunity, not an irksome necessity, nor a tiresome drudgery. He will joyfully recall the Lord’s example as One who came not to be served, but to serve (Mat. 20:26-28). Let our service be to the glory of God (Mat. 5:16).

Christians are free from selfishness. Love motivates mutual service. “What can you do to serve me?” springs from the lips of the selfish. It assaults the ears of the godly, and reverberates through the daily walk of life. It opens the door to the criticisms of the ungodly. We have allowed the world to teach us how to spell--and the world spells service as “serve us.” Not so with God’s people who are freed from the deadly bondage of sin, in order to serve in the bonds of Christian love. Brethren will serve one another cheerfully and faithfully because they serve God cheerfully and faithfully.

In what ways can we serve one another? We can seek the good of one another, serving with a sympathizing ear, a voice of admonition and exhortation, an uplifting hand, a watchful eye, a shoulder upon which to cry, a back

ready to bear the burden, and feet that will take both of us to where we need to go. We can speak the good of one another, serving by encouraging and praising, and by telling the truth, but not to our brother’s hurt.

Love looks for opportunities to serve and rejoices in serving.

If the biblical principle of serving one another sounds foreign to us, the problem may well be a lack of loving. Love makes service meaningful, selfless, and enduring for the one serving, and requires neither praise, promise, nor payment from the one served. When we mirror the love of God in our love one for another, we will happily be in bondage to one another, and will “through love serve one another.”

Bobby Liddell serves as the Administrative Dean for the Memphis School of Preaching.

New Editor

The elders of the Mammoth Spring church of Christ have hired Barry O’Dell as the new preacher for the congregation and editor of FCGN. Barry and his wife, Gail, have two children, Sara, who is 10 years old and Garet, who is 8 years old. Barry is a 1997 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and moved to Mammoth from the Leonard Street congregation in Pensacola, FL where he preached for over 7 years. He also served as an instructor at the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies. We pray that this paper will serve the brotherhood well as a source of encouragement and sound doctrine.

Nicodemus and Baptism

by Barry O'Dell

Only John's gospel tells of a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews, by the name of Nicodemus. We are introduced to this man on the occasion of his coming to Christ at night with an observation (Jn. 3:2). We also read of Nicodemus as John records a discussion between some officers, the chief priests, and Pharisees about an attempt to arrest Jesus (Jn. 7:45-53). Finally, Nicodemus is revealed as one who assisted in the preparation of the body of Christ after the crucifixion (Jn. 19:39-40). Outside of these accounts we know nothing of the man named Nicodemus.

The Pharisee is best known for his night-time discussion with Jesus about the new birth and the kingdom of God as recorded in John 3. The apostle records,

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:1-5).

An important question for a 21st century reader to ask is, “How did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was saying?” It is rather obvious from the immediate context (v. 4) that he had a misunderstanding about what Jesus was saying. In fact, Jesus said, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things” (Jn. 3:10)? Is it possible to connect a burial in

water (baptism) to what Jesus was saying to this man? Was there anything happening in those days that could have led to that understanding? Consider the following:

1. The kingdom of God was being preached by Jesus, John the Baptizer, the twelve, and seventy disciples sent out by Christ (Matt. 4:17; Matt. 3:2; Matt. 10:7; Lk. 10:9). There were at least 84 people preaching on the same subject during the lifetime of Christ and Nicodemus. They were going from house to house saying, “The kingdom of God is at hand!” We know from all four Gospel writers that the Pharisees heard this teaching and even questioned Jesus about His doctrine. From these facts one can safely make the inference that Nicodemus had heard of the kingdom of God prior to the encounter recorded by the apostle John.

2. When the message of the kingdom of God was being preached by John and others, what was being done? Matthew records about John's preaching, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5-6). John records the following of Jesus and the apostles, “When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus Himself baptized not, but His disciples,)” (Jn. 4:1-2). With the message of the kingdom of God came the message of immersion in water! This also occurred after the establishment of the Lord's church as recorded in Acts 8:12 when the

gospel went to Samaria by the hands of Philip.

Why is it that so many today do not understand the simple teaching of Jesus as recorded in John 3:3-5? When one considers the above stated facts, the passage should become crystal clear. John, his teaching, and his baptism were well known throughout the region at that time. In fact, after his beheading, the memory John the Baptizer haunted Herod, “Herod . . . said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him” (Matt. 14:1-2). Jesus said of John, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11). Many do not believe the connection with baptism and John 3 simply because they are dishonest. On one occasion this writer was told “I just can't believe that John 3 is talking about baptism.” If one is not honest with the word of God, the truth will never be found and obeyed.

There are others who may not understand the teaching of John 3:3-5 simply because they have never been taught the truth. Only the gospel of Christ can save one from the eternal consequences of sin (Rom. 1:16; 6:23). When the pure gospel is sown into an honest and good heart, it will produce good fruit (Lk. 8:15).

CONCLUSION

God expects man to read and understand His word. Paul wrote, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). The subject of baptism is one of eternal consequence because to it is connected the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16) and salvation (1 Pet. 3:21). May we all seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness on the subject of baptism (Matt. 6:33).

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realize the unity for which Christ prayed. "There is one body, 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" (Eph. 4:4-6). There are those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ because they serve themselves (Rom. 16:17-18). All men are subject to Jesus' prayer for unity and Paul's apostolic command for unity (Jn. 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10-13).

3. The Success of Unity (v. 21). The ultimate goal in Christ's prayer for unity is "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." In the first century there were Christians who were "biting and devouring one another" (Gal. 5:15). There were "wars and fightings" among Christians (Jas. 4:1). These attitudes and actions are in direct opposition to the

desire of Jesus Christ. In the world there is more than enough sin, fighting, and division. We certainly do not need it within the churches of Christ. Paul withstood Peter to the face when he saw that Peter was not walking "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). How can we convince the world to have peace with God through Jesus Christ if we cannot even have peace among ourselves as believers in Christ?

CONCLUSION

Division exists in religion today because men refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9-11). The truth of the matter is that unity has been prayed for by Christ, commanded by Paul, and it is possible to achieve. May God give us the wisdom and may we all have the heart to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

¹ Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Gospel Advocate Commentaries, Vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1989) pg. 364.

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

1. **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 11:23-24; 16:1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **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.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **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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