

# **The church of Christ and the Plan of Salvation**

## *Basics of the church of Christ – Sermon Number Four*

The most important work of the church of Christ is to spread the gospel. Jesus Christ said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The Apostle Paul wrote that the church was to be seen as the “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15). Without any doubt, the New Testament church dedicated itself to teaching the gospel in an attempt to carry out the commands of Christ to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

It is vital to think about the subject of salvation. The Apostle Paul wrote that we are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Knowing what the Bible says about salvation, and how one is able to obtain it, is certainly a valuable study. To properly examine this subject, wherein there are a number of differences between the church of Christ and denominations, one must be reminded of the importance of the scriptures and the authority they provide. To appropriately understand the issue of the salvation plan, one must examine the scriptures and let those scriptures have the final word. A firm reliance on the bedrock principle of the necessity of Biblical authority stated below will help all who desire to know the truth to focus their attention solely on the scriptures:

*One must consider the following key passages: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17) and “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11). Upon the consideration of these passages, it should be clear, that in all matters of church organization, church doctrine and church practice, there must remain a firm reliance upon the Bible and it alone.*

Through an examination of the scriptures, one finds that there are a number of requirements given in order for a person to obtain salvation and wear the name of Jesus’ followers, “A Christian.”

### ◆ One Must Hear the Word of God

Few, if any, denominations disagree on this – that in order for one to come to Christ, he must have heard the word. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into

judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24). In order to receive that everlasting life, Jesus makes it clear that one will have to hear the word of God. In fact, it is hearing that comes “by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

◆ One Must Believe the Word of God

Without faith, it is “impossible” to please our God (Hebrews 11:6). Again, on the subject of the necessity of faith, virtually all denominational religions agree that faith is essential to salvation. In one of the most quoted New Testament passages, Jesus states, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The Christ also said, “if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

◆ One Must Repent of His Sins

Jesus Christ taught, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). The Apostle Peter connected the concept of conversion with repentance in Acts 3:19. Paul spoke in Athens, saying that God “now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Repentance is a change of one’s mind. It does not make sense that one could name the name of Christ and continue living however he desires. One must “seek first the kingdom of God” and in order to do this, one must repent, changing his life so as to serve God and Him alone (Matthew 6:33).

A failure to repent and to continue living in sin will result in eternal destruction. Peter wrote,

*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).*

It is impossible to become a child of God while at the same time not doing what He has commanded. Therefore, repentance must be taught and demanded of those who desire to become Christians. This is what was taught 2000 years ago and it is the responsibility of Christians today to teach that same message.

◆ One Must Confess Jesus as the Christ

To have faith in Christ is essential to salvation. It is equally important to be willing to confess that faith to others. Paul wrote, “if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For

with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). Again, salvation is coupled with yet another requirement, this time one’s willingness to speak about his faith in front of others. Jesus recognized the importance of this when he said, “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

Our Savior asked Peter, “who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16). Peter believed that Jesus was the chosen one and was also willing to confess that belief before others. Perhaps one of the greatest examples of confession occurs in Acts 8 when the Ethiopian Eunuch was being taught by Philip. In that account, the Ethiopian said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

Perhaps here, more than elsewhere, it is appropriate to deal with some false-teaching on the subject of confession. There might be some who teach that, in order to become a Christian, a person must confess his sins. Such is *never* taught in the New Testament scriptures. The only time that an individual would be required to confess his sins, either to God or to others, is *after* he has become a Christian and then, in prayer to God, asks for the forgiveness of sins which he has confessed to Him (I John 1:9).

#### ◆ One Must Be Baptized

The preceding four requirements are generally agreed to by most people, regardless of their church affiliation. It is on the subject of baptism, however, that serious disagreement exists. The church of Christ teaches the necessity of baptism and that without it, one cannot obtain salvation. As of result of the divisive nature of the subject and the amount of time needed to fully examine what the New Testament scriptures say on it, next week’s sermon will be dedicated entirely to that subject.

#### ◆ One Must Remain Faithful

Once an individual has obeyed the commands of the gospel and begins his life as a Christian, he must remain faithful. In Matthew 10:22, Jesus said, “And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.” One must not endure for a period of time. Instead, one must endure until the end. That is why Jesus said that we are to “remain faithful until death” (Revelation 2:10). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that they were to “remain steadfast, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58).

There is serious disagreement on this subject, however, as many denominations teach the doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” A major tenet of Calvinism, the perseverance of the saints, states that His saints “will remain in God's hand until they are glorified and brought to abide with him in heaven” (<http://www.reformed.org/calvinism>). In agreement with Calvinist doctrine, many churches have taught that there is nothing one can do to lose his salvation.

The church of Christ does not teach this. The reason is that this Calvinist doctrine contradicts the scriptures and based on the principle of Biblical authority, only those things found taught in the New Testament can be viewed as truth.

A careful consideration of the following passages will shed light on the inaccuracy of this doctrine and should cause each of us to, with greater fortitude, truly remain faithful until death.

⇒ *Galatians 5:4* – Speaking to Christians who were members of the church which met in Galatia, the Apostle Paul wrote, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Speaking to Christians who had gotten wrapped up in teaching Old Testament doctrine, Paul explained that they had fallen from grace and were once again in sin.

⇒ *I Corinthians 9:25-27* – Again, speaking to Christians, this time at Corinth, Paul wrote,

*And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

No one doubts the “greatness” of Paul. Yet, even he admitted that it was possible for him to become unfaithful and as a result, stated the importance of remaining faithful until the end.

⇒ *Hebrews 3:6* – the Hebrew writer states, “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.” The simple word “if” signifies that our getting to heaven is conditional on whether or not we remain faithful.

After being baptized, and then going back into the world of sin, Simon the Sorcerer was told to “Repent... and pray” for forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Once he sinned, Simon separated himself from God and needed to renew his relationship with the Creator (Isaiah 59:1 -2). Had he chosen not to repent, he would have remained in sin and in a state of lawlessness (I John 3:4). It may very well be true that the greatest difficulty placed before any person wishing to make it to heaven is remaining faithful to the cause of Christ. Yet, just as it was required for Simon, so is it required of us.

◆ Some Final Thoughts ...

Throughout the New Testament, one examines the scriptures and finds that salvation is offered to mankind by the grace of God. Yet, it is not up to humans to decide which commands are and which commands are not important regarding salvation. Instead, the church of Christ insists on looking to the New Testament, teaching those things which were taught 2000 years ago in an attempt to simply abide by the words of the inspired writers of God who spoke on the subject of what it takes to get to heaven.