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Finally, brethren
WHATEVER THINGS are true
are noble
are just
are pure
are lovely
are of good report
IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE
IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –
meditate on these things.

PHILIPPIANS
4:8

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December 25th

Mike Thomas | Kokomo, Indiana, USA

Mose of the world believes December 25th is the day Jesus was born. The obvious problem with this is the Bible says nothing about it. History shows it was human ideology that made December 25th into a “mass” for Christ to compete with the pagan ritual of worshipping the sun, which already occurred on that date (see “Christmas,” Encyclopedia Britannica). The Bible had nothing to do with the formation of this doctrine, as even the Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent, acknowledges:

Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts; Origen...asserts that in the Scriptures sinners alone, not saints, celebrate their [gods] birthday (newadvent.org, Christmas).

If Jesus wanted a special day set aside to remember His birth, He would have directed His saints to do so. He sent the Spirit to the apostles to inspire them with the teachings of Christianity — “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5). At no time did they instruct people with the holiday of Christmas, but they did tell Christians to conduct a memorial service every “first day of the week” (Acts 20:7) in partaking of the “Lord’s supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20). The purpose of this memorial is to reflect on Jesus’ body “which is broken for you” (verse 24) and His blood “which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). We can read of saints gathering together to engage in this ceremony (Acts 2:42), but nowhere (not once!) do we see them memorializing the day Jesus was born, let alone on December 25th. The only time that day was significant to them was when it fell on a Sunday; the day they had communion in the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Some will ask, "Where's the harm in remembering Jesus' birth?" None whatsoever. We should praise Him for all that He did, even His marvelous birth (Luke 2:10). But praising Jesus and establishing doctrine are not the same thing. Circumcision as a medical procedure is harmless; circumcision as a doctrine is a sin (Acts 15:3). Washing hands is good; washing hands as an act of worship is wrong (Mark 7:2-8). No one has a right to declare something holy or sacred except Jesus (Ephesians 1:22-23) — and He has said nothing about special days and seasons in Christianity (Galatians 4:10-11). His will is for saints to remember His death every first day of the week ("do this in remembrance of Me," 1 Corinthians 11:24). Men say to memorialize His birth once a year and selected a pagan holiday as the day to do so. This is no different than what Cain did in substituting a vegetable sacrifice for a blood sacrifice (Genesis 4:2-5). He went beyond what God had revealed for worship and was rejected. Those who make Jesus' birth into a religious doctrine have added to His pattern for New Testament worship (Revelation 22:18-19). They are not walking by faith in His word (Hebrews 11:4). If Jesus wanted us to celebrate December 25th as His birth He would have told us. But since His word does not declare that day or event to be holy, and teaches the Lord's Supper instead, we must not teach "as doctrine the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7) to celebrate Christmas as a religious event. This didn't work for Cain; it won't work for us. God is looking for worshippers who worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Question About African Response to Tragedy

As you have been there, what do people in Africa do when tragedy strikes? I would assume there is no government assistance, but what would the "average Joe" do, rely upon neighbors and friends, become resourceful? I often fear we have become enablers, however I also want to be compassionate to those in need. I often try to mentally put myself in those situations and ask myself what I would do? I also wonder if budgeting is considered? When he gets support, which I also assume he is probably better off than most in his community because they do not have "outside resources" to ask for assistance from, does he put aside for incidents such as this? Lastly, can we verify? We should "trust, then verify". It's a real struggle for me.

American Response

Clint McBryde | Ash Flat, Arkansas, USA

I do not pretend to know all the difficulty and adversity that brethren face in other places in the world. I do know the history of brethren here in the State of Arkansas and how churches were established and functioned without any assistance from anyone outside their town. I am going back in history at least 100 years when many churches began in my area. The meeting houses were built and functioned without electricity or running water or toilet. The church was typically started within a family or a collection of local families that were converted by a traveling gospel preacher. The preacher would hold a Gospel meeting and often convert 50 or more people. The converts would organize themselves as best they could according to scripture and establish a church in a township or other place. They met in their converts homes or rented facilities as they had opportunity, ability, or need. If and when they could afford a separate building, then they would build one. There was typically only one Bible in a home or only in the church building. The meeting house was built by local members hands with their own funds. Most structures were one room, with no electricity and no bathroom facility. Typically they met Sunday for short periods and during the day, some congregations met all day long. The preaching and teaching was completed by heads of families, visiting preachers, or a located preacher. The economy of the area would usually dictate how often they heard a trained preacher. Often the lessons were reading passages of scripture, as men had little formal training. When men were qualified, elders were appointed who took over shepherding of the flock from the families heads as the scripture teaches. They buried their dead with their own hands and comforted one another. They nursed their own sick and only sought medical attention if they could afford it and if a doctor was available. They prayed a lot. They farmed their own land and often had little or no money for a collection. The preaching was seldom compensated, and preachers often had to provide for their own needs first, then they traveled to preach. Some preachers were single or had only a wife that they left at home or with extended family. Some preachers had children and others had none. Preachers survived only on the benevolence of their converts and otherwise looked to themselves for their own

needs. Support from other congregations was seldom or nonexistent because churches had little contact with one another. If a preacher married, then he required a strong wife committed to the duty of the kingdom because they often went hungry. These women were equally devoted to the Lord as they were their marriage. because they often bore the difficulty of poverty.

I received this information mostly from oral tradition told to me by older members, many now deceased. I am telling it to you because you asked.....how? Well the truth is that I do not know how you can accomplish this task in your country. I can only tell you how it has been accomplished in my country. My brethren and I now reap the benefits of the labors of those gone before us. Brethren here in my part of the world faced similar challenges like you with no phone, internet, or computer to reach out with for help. They were forced to look within themselves for the answer that was permitted by scripture. If we were forced to start over in Evening Shade, Arkansas then we would follow the same pattern as those who went before us. It's the only pattern we know, save what other instruction we read in the scriptures. I wish I had a better wisdom to give you or more precise instruction. I am not there and I would not be so arrogant as to try to give advice on a place I know little about. I admonish you to pray for the wisdom you seek and if it pleases the lord he will send you better advice than mine.

African Response

Chizuru Lowell Odoemelam | Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria

Every local congregation is responsible to meet its own needs (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 6:1-4), and in a case where it cannot, it may beckon other congregations to come to its aid (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9).

God desires equality among brotherhood especially in time of emergency (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

Again preachers meet their needs in two ways. A preacher who is in need that he cannot help himself with can call on the brethren for assistance (1 Corinthians 9:14; Philippians 4:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8). Always I think a preacher should have something else attached to his preaching job (2 Corinthians 11:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9), but it depends on the brethren you are working with.

But it is very unfortunate that most of us were not opportuned to go to higher institutions and did not learn any skill before we joined the field.

Paul worked with his own hands in meeting up with some of his needs apart from the support he received from churches and individual brethren (Acts 18:1-3). So I think we should follow the same way (Philippians 4:9).

Here in Africa preachers suffer a lot, and many brethren do not care and are not ready to care. If not for the American brethren many of the preachers here would have to suffer more.

There is nothing more the church can do than to keep giving as God have prospered them and use the funds in meeting their needs and needs of other congregations around them in time of emergency (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9).

Congregations in the New Testament contributed to the needs of others in their time of need and we should not grow weary in doing so (Galatians 6:9).

We cannot build business centers for churches to generate funds in case of tragedy or for any other reason (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 John 9).

The problem is that we in this part of the world are not really doing better in all these areas, and many preachers that work with bigger congregations don't encourage their congregations to help in time of

emergency and needs of other congregations (James 4:17).

My Response

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

I have made a number of trips to Africa and have preached in six African countries (Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania). There are American preachers far more knowledgeable of Africa than I, because they have either lived there or made many more trips there than I have. Of course, faithful African preachers, and there are many, are the best sources of accurate information. But only a few of them understand America. Almost all Africans I have met view America as fabulously wealthy with far more money than we need. Compared to most Africans, that is true. But we must live in American society. Very few African preachers have a motorized vehicle of any kind, much less a car. But it would be impossible for me to do my work without a dependable car.

Both brethren McBryde and Odoemelam are faithful and dedicated preachers. Brother McBryde and his wife work at secular jobs to support themselves, and he is the preacher for the Main Street Church of Christ in Evening Shade, Arkansas. The McBrydes and the Main Street Church of Christ have been very zealous in helping African brethren. Brother Odoemelam has tried to raise money for his wife to start a roadside market stand, but has not been successful. He preaches for a small, struggling congregation, because he stands for the truth. The Main Street Church of Christ has often helped him.

From time to time, rural African brethren are afflicted by famines. They are subsistence farmers, are completely dependent upon the weather, and receive no government assistance.

Africans, with meager incomes, face even more problems from disease and accidents than Americans. Most Americans don't even know what it's like to have malaria, which almost all Africans suffer from at least occasionally. AIDS is common across much of Africa. I could go on and on.

Preachers should not live above other brethren (1 Corinthians 9:19-22), but they have the right to "live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:1-14), and they have expenses peculiar to their work. African brethren must learn to contribute to the local church where they are members even if they can only give a very small amount (Matthew 12:41-44).

I have often asked American brethren to send money to African brethren due to famines. I try to get support for African preachers I know and trust who are in difficult circumstances. I try to ignore African preachers, even if I know them, who are continual beggars.

It's past time for large, wealthy African congregations and wealthy African brethren, and there are some in Nigeria, to come to the assistance of their impoverished brethren. Some do so.

Question from Uganda about the Brothers of Jesus

Question

I am studying with a group of Catholics and today I met a strong challenging question from Matt 13:54-46 and Mark 6:2-3. And the question is: James, Joses, Jude and Simon biological brother of Jesus or not. The Catholics say, these men are just cousins of Jesus.

Please give me the biblical answer. I told them Jesus are brothers to those men and that Mary produced more children with Joseph. Corresponding scriptures are Matt 1:20-21.

Answer

The word translated "brothers" is the Greek word "adelphos." It is found 344 times in the New Testament

and is never translated “cousin,” even in the **Douay-Rheims and New American Bible**, which are Catholic translations. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, Vine’s Expository Dictionary, Arndt & Gingrich Greek Lexicon, and Mounce’s Expository Dictionary, standard scholarly works, all give “brother” or “male children of the same parents” (Vine) as the primary meaning of the word. There is another Greek word for “cousin,” *anepsios*,” found only in Colossians 4:10. If the context demands it, the word can mean “near kinsman” (Vine), but that is a secondary meaning and must be demanded by the context. The association of his brothers with his mother and sisters indicates these are literal, fleshly brothers of Jesus (Matthew 13:55-56; 12:47-48; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:12; Acts 1:14). The only reason to reject the fact Jesus had fleshly brothers and sisters, children of the same mother, is the false Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Not only do the Scriptures not teach this doctrine, they imply Joseph and Mary had sexual relations after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:24-25). The false Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary makes Mary a sinful woman, for it is a sin for a wife to permanently withhold her body from her husband (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

Question from Uganda about Apocryphal Books

Question

Please, there is one other question: How many books does the catholic bible have? The bibles we read have 66 books. What are the names of those extra books of the catholic bibles?

Answer

The Table of Contents of the **New American Bible** (NOT **New American Standard Bible**), a modern (copyright 1970) Catholic translation, lists in the Old Testament, in addition to the 39 Old Testament books in Protestant Bibles, Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch, 7 books in all. All are grouped in the Old Testament. They are called “apocryphal” books, meaning “of doubtful authenticity.” These books were never accepted as part of the inspired Scriptures and included in the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament, by the Jews. They were not included in the Hebrew books of Scripture. Jesus placed His stamp of approval on the Scriptures recognized by the Jews as inspired Scripture (John 10:35). The Jews divided these into three categories – Law, Psalms, and Prophets (Luke 24:44), but they included all but only the 39 Old Testament books in the Protestant Bible. Jerome, the great scholar (born about 357 A.D.), who translated most of the Scriptures into Latin, and whose translation became the basis of the *The Vulgate*, the Bible used by Catholics until modern times, did not accept these books as inspired Scripture. During the Counter Reformation, the Catholic reaction to the Protestant Reformation, the Pope insisted these apocryphal books were inspired Scripture because they contained some references advocating praying for the dead. Of course, Catholics used this to support praying dead relatives out of the imaginary place called “Purgatory.” There is no sound basis to consider these books as part of inspired Scripture. Some of them particularly 1 and 2 Maccabees, have value as historical sources for the period of silence between Malachi and Matthew. Since not even Catholics claim they are part of the New Testament, no one should consider them as authoritative guides for us today (Hebrews 8:6-13).

The Works of the Flesh

Sunday Ayandare | Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

We live in perilous times. Morals have degenerated to an abysmally low level. One could be tempted to say that the situation has reached its nadir. Reminiscent of the days of old, men are today calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). But sadder still, as far as the pattern of life of some is concerned, the distinguishing marks between the children of God and those fathered by the devil have been reduced to zero. But Paul says those who practice the works of the flesh “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). This is another way of saying they will be lost and will be lost eternally.

What Is the Flesh?

In the scriptures, the flesh (“sarx”) is used in various senses. It is taken for living men and even animals in general (Genesis 6:13; 7:15-16). It may also be used to refer to a relation or one of the same kindred (Genesis 37:27). In 1 Corinthians 15:50, “the flesh and blood” which cannot inherit the kingdom of God has reference to the quality of corruption to which our bodies are subject in this life. When Paul speaks of living in the flesh or abiding in the flesh in Philippians 1:22, 24, it is obvious from the context that he has in mind the estate of this present life. Moreover, that Ishmael was “born after the flesh” is an allusion to the fact that he was born according to the course of nature. However in Romans 7:18 and 8:1, 4-7, the flesh means not just the physical body, but that capability of wrong which may include both body and mind. We should take cognizance of the fact that the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 include both sins in which the human body is active (e.g. fornication and drunkenness) and also those that involve attitude of heart (e.g. hatred, emulation, envy).

Contrary to the thinking of some, man does not inherit deep-dyed perversity from Adam. When he was created, God’s pronouncement on him was “good” (Genesis 1:31). Nevertheless, he became a sinner essentially because of transgression of God’s will (1 John 3:4). He was not forced to transgress God’s will, but he fell into transgression because he chose to (Ecclesiastes 7:29). He fell because he was “drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15).

By nature, man is neither carnal nor spiritual. But he chooses to be either. He has the capacity of choosing which way he wants to go. This leads to the inescapable conclusion that the flesh which “lusteth against Spirit” (Galatians 5:17) and of which “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8) represents the perverse desires that hijack our hearts from God. These perverse desires are “your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate ambition, evil concupiscence and covetousness which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). These desires must be mortified. Viewed from this perspective, the flesh must be crucified with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24).

Is crucifying the flesh an easy task? No! Indeed, it is a painful exercise. In order for us to subordinate our own will to that of God, there must be a kind of suffering and self-denial. There is a cross to bear daily (Luke 9:23). The body must be kept under and brought to subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). Every thought must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). We must endure hardships (2 Timothy 2:3). As a matter of fact, we cannot cease from sin unless we are willing to suffer in the flesh (1 Peter 4:1). But the pain will be assuaged by the enjoyment of eternity with God.

Why Do Some Choose to Walk after the Flesh?

Many are carried away by the glamorization of carnality that is so prevalent around us so much that by the time they realize it, they are already captured by the adversary. Remember, “each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin, and the sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15).

We are not to admire sin in any form. Rather we are to hate it (Jude verse 23). “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil (Psalms 97:10). The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria have a saying that you do not have to smell something that you are not prepared to eat. To avoid drunkenness, for example, the word of inspiration says “look not thou upon the wine when it is red when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright, at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder...” (Proverbs 23:31-35).

Old habits die hard, people say. Perhaps because of this, some have not found it easy to discard entirely the practices of the flesh. Like the proverbial dog, they turn to their own vomit again (2 Peter 2:22). But when a person decides to become a Christian, he becomes “a new creature, the old things are passed away, behold, they are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We should say together with Paul that

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me,

and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20).

On the other hand, as a result of forgetfulness, some others have lapsed into fleshly lusts. Peter tells of the possibility of forgetting that we have been purged from our old sins, resulting in barrenness or unfruitfulness in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8-9). Moreover, we are commanded to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). But it should be very obvious to everyone that when growth is not evident or it is stunted by inadequate spiritual nourishment, the result will be a life saturated with the practices of the flesh.

How to Crucify the Flesh

Let us now shift our focus and reflect on how to crucify the flesh. Surely, the flesh could be crucified. Paul says those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24). How? First, if we fear the Lord and fear Him sufficiently enough, we are going to overcome the flesh. The word of God says, “... by the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil” (Proverbs 16:6). When questioned by Abimelech, king of Gerar, as to why he did not disclose that Sarah was his wife, Abraham replied that “because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife’s sake” (Genesis 20:11). Moreover, what prevented Joseph from committing adultery with his master’s wife? The fear of God. Listen to him: “how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against my God?” (Genesis 39:7-9). Oh yes, “the fear of the Lord is to hate evil...” (Proverbs 8:13).

As a corollary to this, if it is our heart’s desire to overcome the flesh, we should not naively associate it (the flesh) with glamor. Rather, we should abhor and detest it. Remember, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Joseph did not have to look on that woman whether she was glamorous. He had a strong determination, rooted in the fear of God, not to give in and he did not. The Bible says, “ye that love the Lord, hate evil” (Psalms 97:10).

Still drawing from the example of Joseph on the ways of overcoming the flesh, we read that when the woman got hold of Joseph and asked him to “lie with me,” Joseph left his garment and fled and got out of the house” (Genesis 39:11-13). The word of God says, “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Joseph did just that! The apostle Paul warned about youthful lusts and suggested a way of overcoming it: **Flee** (2 Timothy 2:22). Indeed, we are to abstain from every appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). The trouble with many of us is that instead of paying attention to these admonitions and flee from the works of the flesh, they prefer to see how close they can get to sin. And in doing that, they are caught in the web of the flesh. Do you want to overcome and crucify the flesh? One good way of doing that, according to the scriptures, is to flee, to abstain.

Fourth, develop optimistic attitude. Know assuredly that you can conquer the flesh. Paul says “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh ...” (Galatians 5:24). It is the promise of God that He “will also make a way of escape” out of every temptation for His children (1 Corinthians 10:13). Remember, “God hath not given us spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

Fifth and perhaps most importantly, be prayerful. We should realize that of our own selves, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Peter learnt this the hard way. He denied his Lord three times (Matthew 26:75). But this was the very Peter who had boasted a while ago that “though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee” (Matthew 26:33-35). Could it be that Peter was basking in the arm of the flesh? Was he relying on his own power to stick to his Lord? Perhaps. In contrast, Paul says he can do all things. How? “Through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The Lord Jesus shortly before He ascended to heaven left a promise behind: “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). So let us be thankful to God who causes us to triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14).

In conclusion, consider the fact that life is short and death is sure. Many things are uncertain in this world,

but by the word of God we know judgment is certain. Sooner or later we shall appear before the great tribunal and give account of ourselves to the righteous Judge. Surely, heaven will be worth whatever price we may have to pay!

The Baptist Church and the Bible (3)

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

Perseverance of Saints

Baptist Manual, page 67 - "We believe the Scriptures teach that such as are truly regenerate, being born of the Spirit, will not utterly fall away and perish."

The Bible – The Baptist Manual statement reflects what is called “the impossibility of falling away,” or “the impossibility of apostasy.” In other words, once a person has been truly saved, he cannot fall away from the faith and be lost. To get the full meaning of the Manual’s statement, following is a quote from Sam Morris, which statement was made and accepted by the Southern Baptist Convention on May 9, 1963.

God’s Power of Grace—(from a statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention May 9, 1963) Sam Morris, a Baptist preacher in Stamford, Texas wrote a little tract explaining that all the sins one may commit cannot harm the soul or cause the person to be lost. Look at the quote:

“We take the position that a Christian’s sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger... The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul... The way I live has nothing whatsoever to do with the salvation of my soul” (“Do a Christian’s Sins Damn His Soul?”).

It’s hard to believe that this is the official doctrine of the Baptist Church. But there it is, a direct quote from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963. I do not think all members of Baptist churches are aware of that, and I do not think all members believe that. But that is the official doctrine of the Baptist Church.

Now, let’s see what God’s word has to say on the subject. First in Hebrews 6:4-6:

“For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

Consider the fact that those mentioned had been “enlightened,” and had been “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” but had “fallen away.” How could you be a “partaker” without being in a saved condition? And how in the world could you “fall away” from something you had not been “in?” And it seems these were so hardened in heart that it is “impossible” to bring them back to Christ. This passage doesn’t fit well with the Baptist Church doctrine.

Another passage to consider is 2 Peter 2:20-21:

“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.”

Note that they had “escaped the defilements of the world,” and then they were “again entangled” or went back to the world. Question: how can you return to something you never left? Peter said they had “escaped.” If a person is in prison and escapes, doesn’t that mean that he is no longer in prison? And if for some strange reason he decides to go back to the prison, doesn’t that mean that he is no longer free? So if one has escaped from the prison of sin, that means he is free, he is “saved.” But he is still a free agent, and if he decides to go back to the world, that is his choice. “Once saved, always saved” doesn’t fit the picture.

One other passage will serve to firmly establish the point under consideration. And that is Galatians 5:3-4:

“And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

In this passage and the surrounding verses, Paul is dealing with Jews who have become Christians, and are trying to force Gentile converts to abide by some of the regulations of the Law of Moses, particularly the law of circumcision. Paul has pointed out that the Law of Moses has been done away with, and has been replaced by the new law which has been given by Christ. So they can’t pick and choose. It’s either the whole Law of Moses or none of it. And of course, there was no salvation under the old law.

But notice some key words. Paul says if they try to bind circumcision, they have been “severed from Christ,” and have “fallen from grace.” How can you be “severed” from something you had never been a part of? Can there be any clearer refutation of the denominational doctrine that anyone “being born of the Spirit, will not utterly fall away and perish...?”

But according to the Baptist doctrine as stated by Sam Morris, if I have been saved, I am free to go out to rob and kill, lie and commit adultery, and who knows what else, but I cannot lose my soul. Who can believe it? (to be continued)

Just A Normal Day

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

I woke up this morning around 6 A.M., just like most days. The rooster was crowing outside and it was just beginning to dawn. It was time to get out of bed, wash my face, brush my teeth, and get dressed for the chores of the day. The coffee is brewing, bacon frying in the pan, biscuits in the oven, eggs will soon be done. Breakfast was finished and off to work on the farm for the day. Where to begin is my immediate thought?

It has been a very productive year thus far. All the crops are out of the field, and now where am I am going to store them until they are sold? It has been a good year for corn, beans, and hay. While surveying the situation, there are some really old barns and silos which need to be torn down and replaced. They are no longer in use and just taking up space which needs to be used for newer more modern barns and storage bins. So, the decision has been made to tear down these old barns and silos and to build larger ones, ones that are more modern which can best serve the needs to store all the crops.

There is a very trustworthy man in the community who can build the barns and storage bins which are needed. So, a time has been scheduled to meet with him to discuss the price, the size and the place of their construction. Help was also arranged for tearing down of the old ones and the removal of the remnants of them to the land fill. Been a busy morning so now it is time for lunch. On the way home there is a local restaurant where many stop in to get a bite to eat. Upon entering, there are several eating there whom I know very well. Very pleasant conversation about the good weather we have had and how good it was for a successful growing season. Lunch is finished and now off to finish the tasks of the day.

The fields need plowing for the winter crops to be planted. The oil is checked in the tractor, the plow is attached, and off to the field for the work to be accomplished. Quite a bit of the plowing has been done, now to check on the price of the seed to be planted and how much is needed. By now it is getting late and the sun is beginning to set. The work for this day is completed and it is time to retire for the evening. As I enter the house the smell of food cooking permeates the air. My wife greets me, and the children are all happy I am home from working on the farm. We all gather around the table, enjoy a good meal, discuss our day's activities.

The dishes were washed and put away, the food left over is stored, and then off to the living room to watch a little TV and to read the newspaper. Once the paper was read, I begin to think about when the children are all grown, leaving home to begin a new phase of their life. And as we grow older, we will have enough laid aside to enjoy our retirement years. May even sell the farm and move to some place warm. Then it happened! I experienced chest pain, began to perspire, and was very nauseated. The EMT's were called, arriving in just a few short minutes, but finding they were too late to save this man from his massive heart attack. Life on earth for him was over.

"Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:13-21).

The man we described is not any different than the one which Jesus speaks about. They forgot about death. They forgot about eternity. And most of all they forgot about God. Neither saw tomorrow! We must make sure we are rich toward Jehovah, and then it will not matter if death comes calling even tonight.

Who Is The Lord That I Should Obey His Voice?

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...Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'This says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go' (EXODUS 5:1-2)

Ignorant of the power of the God of Israel, and bound up in his own arrogance, Pharaoh refused to release the children of Israel. He was the king of Egypt, considered by all to be the god of the land. He was Pharaoh (phe-rah - the sun). He owned all the land of Egypt, all the flocks and herds of Egypt, all the people of Egypt. Why should he heed the feeble God of an enslaved people?

The same arrogant defiance which caused Pharaoh to set himself against the Lord brings many today to utter the same question. The apostle Paul wrote concerning the wicked:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened ... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting... (Romans 1:20-21, 28)

Let us consider who the Lord is, that we should obey Him.

He is The One True God

God has made no attempt in His word to prove His existence. He simply declared of Himself, *"I AM WHO I AM"* (Exodus 3:14). The Lord declared that the works which He performed in Egypt were to the end that the people of Israel *"might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him"* (Deuteronomy 4:35). Paul declared that we can be assured of His existence, as evident *"...by the things that are made..."* As the Psalmist wrote, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1).

Thus, man is held accountable before the Lord, to follow Him. Elijah challenged the people, *"How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him"* (1 Kings 18:21).

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declare it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one (Isaiah 44:6-8).

He Is The Creator And Sustainer Of Life

The very first words recorded by Moses declare, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). Further revealing the Creator, the apostle John likewise affirmed, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made"* (John 1:1-3).

James acknowledged our dependence on God, saying, *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that' (James 4:13-15).* Each day we have is because the Lord has given it to us. It is not according to our own will that we woke up from sleeping this morning - it is because the Lord permitted it to be so.

He Gave Himself For Us

The apostle John recorded, *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us..."* (1 John 3:16). On account of the love of God, Jesus became the sacrifices by which we might receive redemption from our sins. The apostle Paul explained, *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteousness man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:6-8).

Our Lord, perfect and holy, without spot or blemish, became the sacrifice upon which our sins were laid. *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. 1 Peter 2:22-24).

He Is The Judge Of Mankind

The Hebrew writer pointedly said, *"...it is appointed for me to die once, but after this the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). Each of us will appear before the Lord in judgment to *"...receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10). Having been warned, it behooves us to prepare ourselves for the judgment.

The Lord has not left us wanting. He has revealed to us the law by which we will be judged, that which *"...at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also*

bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Hebrews 2:3-4). We can have confidence in the Scriptures, which have been recorded and preserved, that we today might know what the will of God is. And further, might we seriously study and apply the same word, for our Lord said, "...He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him - the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

It is Our Purpose In Life

No more fundamental question exists for man than that of his purpose. Why are we here? What are we supposed to spend our lives doing? Solomon, a man endowed with great wisdom gave considerable thought and experimentation to these questions. He tested earthly wisdom, pleasure, great possessions - tie and again, he concluded, *"...all is vanity and grasping for the wind"* (Ecclesiastes 2:17; etc.). Finally, he concluded, *"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Why obey the voice of the Lord? He is the eternal God, there is none like Him. He is both Creator and Sustainer of the earth and those who dwell on it. He is the Saviour of man, having provided redemption through His Son. He is the eternal Judge, before whom all men will stand and give account of themselves. As our God, Creator, Sustainer, Saviour and Judge, may we conclude as Solomon - "Fear God and keep His commandments." This is my all.

Hatred

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

Years ago a song went, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." I don't care for the song, since the singer blasphemously tried to give advice to God about what we need and apparently didn't know the Lord has done and is doing all He can without violating our free will to get us to quit hating each other and to start showing love to one another. But "love" is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and "hatred" is a sinful work of the flesh that will bar us from the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21). What does the Lord teach us about hatred?

The term translated "hatred" in the **New King James Version** and **King James Version** is rendered "enmities" by the **New American Standard Bible** and "enmity" by the **English Standard Version**. Foerster defines the term as "hostility" (TDNT. 3:811), whereas Wuest explains it as "enmity and hostility in whatever form manifested" (158). Vine further explains, "It is the opposite of agape, love"(201). Thus, as "love" is active good will, "hatred" is active bad will.

The brothers of Joseph exhibited hatred (enmity) toward Joseph.

"But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (Genesis 37:4).

Thus they sought to kill him, but when Reuben talked them out of their evil course, they sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:12-28).

Not all hatred is wrong. We must "hate evil" (Psalm 97:10). In fact, if we don't hate evil, we don't love the Lord (Ibid). We must "hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104). False doctrine causes people to be lost (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12), so we should hate it. If we love the law of the Lord, we will "hate and abhor lying" (Psalm 119:163). We, as the Lord, must hate lawlessness (Hebrews 1:9). We must hate "the world," i.e. sin and the things that allure us to sin, else we hate God (1 John 2:15-17; cf. Romans 8:6-8; James 4:4).

Thus, it is the object of hatred that determines whether it is sinful or righteous. What we hate reveals what we love.

So the wrong kind of hatred is sinful. We must not hate other classes of people because they are different from us. Jews hated Gentiles because they were different, but Christ by His death on the cross removed the cause of enmity, the Law (Ephesians 2:11-18).

We must not hate any people, not even those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43-48). By loving our enemies, we “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:19-21). When we hate those who do us harm, we allow them to pull us down to their level.

We must never hate our brethren. “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15).

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”
(1 John 4:20; cf. 1 John 2:9, 11).

Islam, despite what Muslims claim, advocates and practices hatred for all “infidels,” non-Muslims and members of other Muslim sects. Denominations of Christendom proclaim a misguided love that demands acceptance of sin. The Lord demands, “Hate evil, love good” (Amos 5:15). In fact, unless we hate evil, we do not love the Lord (Psalm 97:10) nor fear Him (Proverbs 8:13). We must love what the Lord loves and hate what He hates.

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

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Introduction

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37b)

“Lord, what do You want me to do?”(Acts 9:6a)

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30b)

Although these quotations are taken from various portions of Scripture, they all have something in common. Although phrased in different ways, each is a posing of the question, “What must I do to be saved?” In fact, these are the only recorded occurrences of this inquiry after Jesus’ death. No more important question has ever been asked, for it involves directly the salvation of the human soul, and one human soul is worth more than all the material wealth of the world.

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works
(Matthew 16:26-27).

Furthermore, the inquiry demonstrates that something must be done by the sinner if he is to be saved. It is not, “What must be done for me?” but “What must I do?” As the Lord emphatically stated, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The puzzling thing about this question is that each time it is posed it receives a different reply. But I believe I can illustrate why this is so. Just suppose that, as I begin a trip by car from Houston, Texas to Chicago, Illinois, I stop at a service station and ask the distance. Upon consulting a chart, the attendant informs me it is 1082 miles to Chicago. I then drive to Memphis, Tennessee and ask again, “How far must I drive to reach Chicago?” The question is the same as before, but because I am at a different point on the road, I will receive a different answer, 532 miles. Suppose I drive to Sikeston, Missouri, stop and ask the same question. This time the answer is 397 miles. I would have posed the same inquiry three times and would have received three entirely different but equally truthful answers, because each time I posed the

question I was at a different point on the road to Chicago. The principle is also true on the road to salvation.

Let us begin our journey to salvation by asking, "What must I do to be saved?" and noting the various replies given by the inspired scriptures.

Philippian Jailer

First we'll ask of Paul and Silas. In Acts 16:16-34 we find these men of God in the city of Philippi.

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.' And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, 'These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.' Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:16-30).

Because Paul and Silas healed "a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination," her masters, who were making money from her sad condition, had the two preachers beaten and cast into the dungeon of the prison. As they, in this seemingly awful situation, "were praying and singing hymns to God" (verse 25), an earthquake opened the prison doors at midnight (verse 26). The jailer, "supposing the prisoners had fled," decided to commit suicide (verse 27). "But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.'" (verse 28) The trembling jailer fell down before Paul and Silas and pleadingly inquired, "Sirs. what must I do to be saved?" (verses 29-30)

He did not desire salvation from the earthquake nor from punishment as the result of allowing the prisoners to escape, for both of these dangers were passed. He desired salvation from eternal condemnation. God will

give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

What was he told to do? We have two ways of knowing: by what is recorded that was said to him and by what he did.

Paul and Silas replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (verse 31). They took him where they found him on the road to salvation, a pagan, and told him the first

step to take toward forgiveness.

But they did not stop there. They also “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.” (verse 32)

What was included in “the word of the Lord” they spoke to him? We find this out by seeing what the jailor did in response to their words. He certainly repented, for a changed life is the evidence of repentance, and his life was changed greatly from the time he willingly helped persecute Paul and Silas (verses 23-24) to the time he cared for their wounds and fed them.

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household (verses 33-34).

Furthermore, he was baptized (verse 33), and only then was he called a believer (verse 34), because the saved believer is the baptized believer.

Thus, the jailor, a pagan, was told to believe, repent and be baptized.

Jews on Pentecost

As we continue our journey, let us ask Peter the distance. When the apostle Peter gave his reply to the inquiry, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?,” he was addressing an assembly of very religious Jews. “And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Thus, they already believed in God.

Furthermore, he had already preached a sermon to them in which he proved that Jesus was “both Lord and Christ.” “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Thus, these people did not need to be told to believe, for they had already passed that point on the road to salvation.

As the result of Peter’s piercing message, the Jews on Pentecost “were cut to the heart.” “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”(verse 37) Their consciences were deeply hurt. They believed that Jesus was the Christ. They cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “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” (Acts 2:38). As the result of this command, “those who gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

Therefore, the Jews on Pentecost, who already believed in God and Jesus Christ, were told to “Repent, and ... be baptized.”

Saul of Tarsus

As we stop at the final point before we reach our destination, let us ask Ananias how far we have left to go.

In Acts 9:1-6 we find Saul of Tarsus, a zealous Jew, journeying from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute disciples.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the

goads.' So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do' (Acts 9:1-6).

As he came near Damascus the Lord appeared to him in a bright light from heaven, not for the purpose of saving him, but for the purpose of qualifying him to be "a minister and a witness" (Acts 26:15-18), i.e., an apostle. Much later Paul related this fact to King Agrippa.

So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me' (Acts 26:15-18).

Saul earnestly asked, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6a) If ever there were a wonderful opportunity for the Lord to miraculously save a man, this would have been it. But he refused. He told Saul, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (verse 6b).

The Lord does not save people directly and miraculously. He requires that they hear the Gospel How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:14-17).

What was Saul's condition at the time his question was answered? He was a believer, for when the One who appeared to him identified Himself as Jesus, Saul called Him "Lord" (Acts 9:5-6). Likewise, the facts Saul fasted and prayed are evidence he had repented. "And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9). When the Lord sent Ananias to him, He said to Ananias, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying (Acts 9:11).

What did Ananias tell this penitent believer to do? "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). As the result, Saul "was baptized." (Acts 9:18) Saul of Tarsus was told to be baptized.

Conclusion

The total of the journey to salvation is this: Upon hearing the Gospel, you must believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; you must repent of your sins; and, upon a confession of your faith in Christ, you must be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Have you made that journey? Are you saved?

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."



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