

Churches of Christ --- Then and Now
Lesson 4 – How are We Justified by Faith?
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Introduction: What is the church of Christ?

- A. There is a definite entrance into this relationship with Jesus.
 - 1. Jesus plainly stated that there would only be one church as there would only be one head. (**Mt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23; 4:4-6**)
 - 2. How did Jesus build His church? (**Acts 2:36-41**)
 - 3. To be a Christian is to be in the church of Christ, or Christ's body. (**Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 12:13**)
 - 4. What do you mean by "the church of Christ?" Because of division and doctrines of men, one cannot determine God's way by the name on the sign alone.
- C. Can we know how a man becomes "justified by faith?"
 - 1. Because he was raised we can know that His death had a great purpose!
 - 2. The message of the apostles in the book of acts shows us a plan for God to forgive us and to receive us into fellowship! (**Acts 13:30-32, 38-39**)

I. How does one become a Christian?

- A. If one will simply raise the question that Jesus does in His dealing with scripture: "What is your reading of it?" then all will be well. (**Lk 10:26**)
 - 1. Rather than reading the esteemed evangelical theologians and developing a human philosophy before reading scripture, let's simply look at how the Apostles preached and taught on this subject!
 - 2. If we take all God says then we can find harmony on this question.
- B. Consider the great commission and the book of Acts. Briefly look at the consistency.
 - 1. The Great commission – (**Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:44-48**)
 - 2. Pentecost – (**Acts 2:36-41**)
 - 3. Peter's sermon at the temple – (**Acts 3:14-19**)
 - 4. The Samaritans – (**Acts 8:12-14**)
 - 5. Paul's Conversion – (**Acts 22:12-16**)
 - 6. The household of Cornelius – (**Acts 10:44-48**)
 - 7. The Philippian Jailer – (**Acts 16:30-34**)
- C. Is salvation by faith conditional or unconditional?
 - 1. When we appeal to the reading of what is "written" the answer is very plain.
 - 2. If men are saved unconditionally before the foundation of the world then they were never lost. (**Lk 19:10**)
 - 3. Men must hear the powerful message of the gospel. (**Eph 1:11-13**)
 - 4. The scriptures basic answer is that man is saved through faith. (**Rom 1:16-17; Rom 4:2-4; Acts 16:30**)
- D. When does faith save?
 - 1. Faith saves when a man responds to a conditional promise of God. When the conditions are met he is then "calling on the name of the Lord." (**Rom 10:13**)

2. The essence of gospel preaching is to establish the fact and the significance of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and then to offer the conditional promises of salvation. (**Rom 10:13-17; Acts 2:21, 38; 22:16**)
 3. Salvation by faith includes repentance, confession and water baptism. Did the jailer just believe? (**Acts 16:30-31**)
 - a. He had to be taught what to believe! What did he do immediately? (**Acts 16:32-33**)
 - b. All that the jailer did was described as believing! (**Acts 16:34**)
- E. Does salvation depend on getting the right doctrine or having the right reasoning on the promises of God?
1. Are these any examples of those who reasoned wrong and were saved?
 2. Some appeal to an example in the life of Christ. (**Lk 9:49-50**)
 - a. Were these men under the authority and direction of Christ?
 - b. Did these have differing doctrines and other “religious codes?”
 3. Did men who had an incorrect teaching and practice of baptism have a right relationship with God without learning the “right religious code?” (**Acts 19:1-5**)
 4. Does the need for correct reasoning and properly responding to conditional promises cause us to be guilty of a “works” salvation? (**Eph 2:4-8; Col 2:12-14**)

II. How does faith continue to save the Christian?

- A. The entire Christian life is one where he is justified by faith.
1. The essence of our walk is described as walking by faith. (**1 Jn 1:7-10**)
 2. The result of our faith is forgiveness through the blood of Christ. (**1 Jn 2:1-3**)
- B. What should a Christian do when he sins?
1. Sin is a transgression of God’s law. (**1 Jn 3:4**)
 2. A Christian is to repent of the sin and then confess it to God. (**Acts 8:22**)
- C. Consider how Abraham was justified by faith.
1. He was justified by faith when he believed a difficult promise of God. Was this the conversion of Abraham? No. (**Rom 4:3-4, 9; Gen 15:6**)
 2. Abraham *already had this justifying faith!* (**Gen 12:1; Heb 11:8**)
 3. The truth is that our faith keeps justifying us as we walk in the light. This was later true of Abraham when he was told to offer Isaac. (**Jas 2:21-24**)
 4. What if Abraham had refused and never repented?
 5. What kind of faith saves? It is the faith of Abraham! (**Rom 4:11-12**)
 6. Can one be lost after becoming a Christian? Yes, they cease to have this saving faith. How will I know this? When I refuse to repent! (**1 Jn 1:6**)
- D. Does God give the Christian continuous cleansing, automatic forgiveness apart from His conditional promises?
1. Do the scriptures teach that that one's sins are cleansed "even as he sins" before and without his repentance?
 2. If I do not believe in “continuous” cleansing then is my only alternative “an equally false view of grace, common in churches of Christ, sometimes called *perfectionism.*”

3. Because I believe in conditional promises does that condemn me to “self-righteousness and division or despair”?
 4. Must I then make the broad generalization that “doctrinal misunderstanding” would *never* separate men from God?
- E. How a Christian has assurance by faith.
1. I simply trust God in the promises that *He has given*.
 2. I do not have to figure out every scenario or possible dilemma. Abraham tried to help God out on one occasion and thought he knew what God would do on another occasion. In both cases he got it wrong! (**Heb 11:17-19**)
 3. I know that I do not have a perfect knowledge or a perfect obedience. I do know the character of the God that I serve and know that *I will be tested* as I seek Him and grow in my knowledge of His way
 4. I dare not proclaim another right with God on the basis of a “right attitude” or sincerity *alone*. I will address issues of understanding, or of right and wrong with all *who will open the scriptures with me*. God is the judge! (**1 Cor 4:3-4**)

III. The “mainstream churches of Christ” are moving away from the gospel

- A. Years ago I asked the question on an Abilene Christian college discussion list: “Should I have left the Baptist church?”
1. The almost unanimous response was “NO!”
 2. Today if you were to suggest that Baptism has any part of one’s salvation you would be called sectarian and/or a legalist!
 3. You will not find any significant debate or reasoning from scripture from most. Rather they say are that sincerity saves and not “doctrinal understanding.”
- B. Consider these quotes from Jay Guin, an Elder from the university church in Tuscaloosa, AL:

1. In his website he explains why he is fine with any mainstream denomination.

“Which church should he join? Well, there’s only one church, and its boundaries aren’t defined by human names. That church is built on the rock of “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And all converts must confess this.

Which congregation should he attend? I’m going to celebrate the growth of the kingdom. We are not in competition. Just like always and everywhere, it’s his choice.

What about baptism? I’m going to teach Jesus. The Baptists will teach Jesus. The Methodists will teach Jesus.”

... In my view, even if he’s taught in error on baptism, if he has a genuine faith in Jesus and a genuine penitence, he’s saved, even though by an imperfect process. -- Jay Gwin

2. The impact of “non-institutional” churches teaching LaGard Smith’s book “Who Is My Brother” is reaping a harvest among many.

To make a bizarre study short, I had people re-define words in a way I never thought they would have. Some said they would call a Baptist a “brother in Christ,” but they could not make a judgment about their salvation. Some said they would call them “believers” but not “Christians” (while in the same breadth telling me that there’s no difference between the two terms). Some said they would “treat them like brothers in Christ,” while maintaining that it’s impossible to truly know whether someone is truly a brother in Christ or not. – A Member of a Non-Institutional church writing to Jay Gwin

I recently asked a young man this question on Facebook “Who is my brother?” The response was sad!

3. Predictably Jay Guin gives the classic protestant definition of salvation:

According to the scriptures, what is it we have to believe to be saved?

*(Acts 15:7 ESV) 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should **hear the word of the gospel and believe.**”*

*(John 8:24 ESV) 24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you **believe that I am he [the one from above]** you will die in your sins.”*

*(John 20:31 ESV) 31 but these are written so that you may **believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

*(Acts 16:31 ESV) 31 And they said, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.**”*

*(Rom 10:9 ESV) 9 because, if you **confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

We are told to believe in Jesus and we'll be saved. Nowhere are we told to believe in baptism. Now, do we accept the authority of the scriptures or not? The texts (and many, many more) say that those with faith in Jesus are saved. I believe them to be the truth.

*(John 3:18 ESV) 18 Whoever **believes in him** is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not **believed in the name of the only Son of God.***

It's pretty plain. If you have faith, you're saved. If not, you're damned. Obviously, the demons don't have faith in the sense in which Jesus uses the word in John or Paul uses the word in Romans, or else we make them out to be liars. I've written extensively on the meaning of "faith" in John and Paul, and it's more than mere intellectual acceptance — it requires a changed heart, as well. James obviously had a narrower sense in mind — unless we wish to make James contradict Jesus.

C. When churches of Christ cease teaching how to enter the body of Christ then they are no longer His body!

1. Many preachers hide these beliefs from their members. They will give the impression that they believe in the “traditional” view of Baptism in churches of Christ.
2. One preacher in Auburn passionately said he still teaches and practices Baptism! He did not say for what purpose Baptism was for. He also did not explain why fellowship is extended to those who have not been baptized for the right reason.
3. When preachers participate in lectures at Pepperdine University and ACU then these questions need to be asked.

Conclusion: We have great assurance before our God on the basis of a living faith!
(1 Jn 5:11-13)

Is The Faithful Saint Continually Cleansed By The Blood Of Jesus Christ?

By Hiram Hutto

First of all, it should be pointed out that the question is self-contradictory. How? It speaks about the blood continually cleansing. **1 John 1:7** tells us that his blood cleanseth us from sin. So, if the blood is continually cleansing, it is continually cleansing from sin, which means that there is sin present that needs cleansing. That being true, the person who is being continually cleansed must be continually sinning. Now, how can a person be called a faithful saint (both terms) while at the same time he is continually sinning? Clearly, the question contradicts itself.

Further, to imply that a Christian is one who continually sins is to contradict the Bible. It says that a Christian does not practice sin (**1 John 3:9, NASB**; the same tense and idea is in **3:6 and 5:18**). If a person who is continually sinning isn't practicing sin, what on earth would he have to do to practice it? Again, when Paul asks, "Shall we continue in sin?", he answers "God forbid" (**Rom. 6:1**). According to the position we are examining, he should have said, "Not only may we continue in sin, but we will be faithful saints while so doing"! The fact is, this passage and others show that sin is not the norm for the Christian, it is the exception.

What is frequently meant by such questions as heads this article is: Is the faithful saint automatically cleansed of sins of ignorance and/or weakness. **1 John 1:7** is cited to prove that he is. Not only does 1 John 1:7 not teach that doctrine, the passage says absolutely nothing per se about sins of weakness or ignorance. It says the blood of Jesus cleanses us "from all sin." Whatever the passage says about sins of ignorance and weakness, it says the same thing about sins of rebellion and disobedience. It says "all sin." But someone might respond (and the idea is current), the person under consideration in 1 John I is said to "walk in the light" and a person who is walking in the light will not be guilty of sins of rebellion and disobedience, only sins of weakness and/or ignorance. Who said so? Did God? If so, where? Obviously, a person who is guilty of rebellion and disobedience is not "in the light" at the point at which he is guilty of rebellion or disobedience, but no sin is "in the light." After all, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (**1 John 1:5**), and if sin is not darkness, what is? There is no sin (rebellion, disobedience, or whatever) in the light.

Consider another point. In **Hebrews 3:2** God says that Moses was "faithful in all his house"; yet at Meribah God said that Moses "did not believe in me" (**Num. 20:12**) and that he "rebelled against my rod" (**v. 24**). Although, in general, Moses was described as faithful, he certainly was not faithful there, neither did God approve nor automatically forgive him. Instead, God was wrath (**Deut. 3:27**) and would not hear Moses, but rebuked him. I cannot conceive of anyone's thinking that he was faithful in the point where God said he did not believe, and that he was rebellious. To say otherwise is to say that a person can be full of faith (faithful) in a point where he is lacking in faith. A person might be faithful in a number of areas, and yet be unfaithful at some particular point, and as it was in Moses' case, a very vital point. Surely nobody would claim that Moses died still impenitent and rebellious about the matter but God forgave him anyway. The idea that the only kinds of sins that a faithful Christian (one who walks in the light) commits are sins of ignorance and weakness is not taught in the Bible, nor does it teach that God automatically forgives those (or any other) sins.

To say that a person is automatically cleansed, like the windshield wiper (or that he benefits; i.e., is forgiven, even as he sins), sounds too much like the Baptist preacher who said that he could seduce some woman but God would work it out for his good (benefit). It reminds me of the Baptist who affirmed in a debate with me that a child of God could get drunk, that he could die drunk, and would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could lie, that he could die with a lie on his tongue (as did Ananias and Sapphira), and he would go to heaven anyway; that a child of God could commit adultery, that he could get killed in the act, and the child of God could commit adultery with a person who was not a child of God, that both of them get killed in the act, and the child of God would go to heaven but the one who was not a child of God would go to Hell. Frankly, it surprised me when he affirmed this publicly and openly, but it shocked me to learn that some brethren evidently believe it and some teach that which logically leads to the same conclusion. I did not believe it then, and I do not believe it now.

The Bible clearly teaches that a child of God can sin. John says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (**1 John 1:8**). But it just as clearly teaches that a child of God does not have to sin. In fact, John wrote his first epistle so that his readers would "sin not" (**2:1**). If a Christian cannot

keep from sinning, he has to sin, and John wasted his letter. Such a claim impugns the wisdom of God. And Peter says, "If ye do these things, ye shall never stumble" (**2 Pet. 1:10**) that a child of God can not fall (note the important difference between "cannot" [impossible] and "can not" [possible not to]). He doesn't have to fall. If a Christian must sin ("man, because he is man, sins" is as false when taught by "conservative" brethren, as it is when taught by Edward Fudge or John Calvin), why does God hold him responsible for doing something he could not keep from doing anyway? Such does away with man's being a creature of choice. Man sins all right enough, not because he must sin, but because he chooses to sin, and therefore is guilty. The idea that a faithful Christian saint is continually cleansed because he is continually sinning is not in the Bible.

Some have even claimed that when a person unknowingly violates God's law, God automatically forgives him (like the windshield wiper), then later when man learns that he has broken God's law he must repent, etc. Why should he repent? What does he have to repent of? After all, if God forgave him at the time he sinned, the sin isn't on his record; he doesn't need to repent. What he should do, if the argument is correct, is thank God for having already forgiven him without repentance and before he ever learned about it! Still others claim that a person who unwittingly violates God's law is not then guilty (they need to read **Lev. 4:13,22,27**) but when he later learns that he has violated God's law, if he does not then repent, he is guilty. Among the many problems with this argument is, it changes God's definition of sin. God said, "Sin is the transgression of the law" (**1 John 3:4**). This doctrine says, "No, this is wrong.

Sin is not the transgression of the law. Sin is the awareness of the transgression of the law." But the Bible doesn't teach that either.

Yes, Christians sin, and God has made provisions for them when they do, but he has made no provisions for them to live in sin. When John states that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, he does what is frequently done in the Scriptures - he is simply stating a truth without giving all the details of the matter. Just as Jesus said, "Father, forgive them" (**Luke 23:34**), he did not give any conditions for forgiveness, and it was several days later when Peter told them what those conditions were (Acts 2:36-38). So the blood cleanses us from all sin (**v. 7**), but it is **verse 9** that mentions one of the conditions man must meet for that forgiveness; it does not mention all of them for it says nothing about repentance. That is learned, elsewhere. The passage also says that we must confess our sins. It does not say we are to confess that we are sinners, nor does it say that if we confess that we are sinners, God will forgive. That may or may not be true, but **1 John 1:7-9** does not say so. It says that we are to confess our sins to be forgiven. Instead of teaching one to be confident of his salvation and feel secure about it because the blood of Christ will automatically or continually cleanse our sins, we need to teach people as Peter did Simon, "Repent . . . of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee" (**Acts 8:22**).

No, the faithful saint is not continually cleansed by the blood of Christ because a faithful saint is not continually sinning. But a saint may be often cleansed by the blood, just as often as he meets the conditions given by God.
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