

# **The Baptismal Regeneration / Believer's Baptism Debate**

A theological and historical overview of the most contested  
subject of the church age.

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ISBN 0-7414-0590-3.

Published by Infinity Publishing.com

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## Chapter Eleven

### Does The Baptism Debate Needlessly Divide The Body Of Christ?

In chapter one of this work we demonstrated what the apostles affirmed: that combining the ritual of circumcision and the law of Moses with the finished work of Christ constitutes another gospel which cannot save. In chapter two we attempted an overview of the purposes and uses of the Mosaic Law and of natural law. We noted that neither law was intended to impart life everlasting. In chapter three we demonstrated that eternal life for any member of Adam's fallen race is by grace through faith, apart from works and ritual, but imparted by the imputed righteousness of God. This has been the plan of redemption agreed upon by the members of the Trinity from before the foundation of the world. In chapter four we affirmed that remission of sins during the ministry of John the Baptist was received by faith in Christ. We demonstrated that the baptisms of John, Jesus and the apostles could not have been a continuation of Essene ritual immersion, nor of an alleged ancient form of Jewish proselyte baptism. We observed that John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul all preached the same gospel of remission of sins. In chapter five we demonstrated that the NT ritual of water baptism did not replace circumcision as the cause of regeneration or as a means of saving grace. Neither ritual has ever been a means of imparting the saving grace of Christ. In chapter six we discussed an overview of the major arguments in favor of infant baptism. In chapter seven we surveyed the dominance of the baptismal regenerationist position throughout church history. In chapter eight we analyzed many of the subjective arguments that are used to defend baptismal regeneration as well as other theological affirmations. In chapter nine we examined the major proof-texts that are used to objectively demonstrate baptismal regeneration from Scripture. In chapter ten we sought to overturn the major arguments used to support the back-loading of the gospel with personal righteousness in order to obtain, and have assurance of, salvation.

It is regrettable that the position of this present work on the nature of the gospel offends so many in Christendom as if this stance is causing division, contention and disunity in the Body of Christ. It is unfortunate that some see this position as literally dissecting the Body of Christ by its insistence that there is only one true gospel. It is lamentable that the believer's baptism position sometimes appears to be condemning anyone to hell if they do not hold to its view of the gospel. On the contrary, no one can know the eternal destiny of anyone who is an advocate an apostate gospel because it is unknowable whether such a person has embraced the true gospel in his earlier life. What can be known, however, is that an apostate gospel does not provide redemption to the one who trusts its promises. In this chapter, we wish to address these concerns and perhaps create comfort as well as caution for those who are still struggling with these issues. Let the reader be assured that most theologians who hold to salvation solely by grace, followed by believer's baptism, expect to meet multitudes of infant-baptized, non-baptized and non-circumcised when they reach eternity. However, some who hold to believer's baptism (present author included) affirm that heaven will be populated uniquely with those who, at some moment in their lives, cast themselves upon the grace and mercy of God alone, apart from ritual and personal righteousness.

In the NT, the analogy of *Body of Christ* is applied to both the invisible, universal Church and the local church. Yet the student of God's word must clearly distinguish between the two. When the phrase *Body of Christ* describes a functioning ministry

designed by God to carry out a mission on earth, it is describing the local church. The NT assumes the presence of division and dissension within the local church. Jesus warned of false prophets which come to the saints in sheep's clothing, but who, in reality, are ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). Jesus spoke of misguided people who will have prophesied in the name of Jesus, exorcised demons in His name, and performed many wonderful works in His name, yet in reality He never knew them (Matt. 7:22, 23). Paul warned the Ephesian bishops to be vigilantly on guard for the wolves that would enter into the local church, and that even some of the bishops would rise up and cause division in the flock (Acts 20:28-31). When some came to the Ephesian congregation claiming apostolic authority, the church placed them on trial and found them to be liars (Rev. 2:2).

Paul told the Roman church that it was those in the congregation proclaiming extra-apostolic doctrine who were the causes of division and offences—

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (Rom. 16:17).

Today we are told that those who are not open to extra-apostolic doctrines and teachings are blasphemously dissecting the Body of Christ, or amputating themselves from the Body. Paul severely admonished the Corinthian congregation for being so naïve that they would fall for someone preaching another gospel, another Jesus and offering another spirit:

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him* (II Cor. 11:4).

Though division is not the will of God, He permitted heretical divisions in the Corinthian church and made use of them in order to manifest those who were true and faithful to the apostolic teachings—

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you (I Cor. 11:18, 19).

God has chosen that through the manifestation of such approved workmen He would preserve the true propagation of the gospel—

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Titus 1:9-11).

Jude told the saints that it was their duty to practice contention when the gospel, and the apostolic doctrines, were at stake:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

Paul and Barnabas set the example by engaging in great dissension and disputation when the Judaizers from within the Jerusalem church challenged their gospel—

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (Acts 15: 1, 2).

When the Apostle Peter and Barnabas were intimidated into publicly endorsing the Judaizer's version of gospel, Paul knew that it was not *The Gospel* and therefore withstood Peter to the face—

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. **But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel**, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Gal. 2:11-16). [Emphasis added]

Paul told the Galatians that another gospel is not the saving gospel:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.(Gal. 1:6-9).

The founder of the NT church, Jesus Christ, caused much more division than unity during His earthly ministry—

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law (Lk. 12:51-53).

So there was a division among the people because of him (Jn. 7:43).

Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a

sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them (Jn. 9:16).

There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind (Jn. 10:19-21).

Although God desires to see unity in the visible church on earth (I Cor. 1:10), He knows that it is Satan's mission to infiltrate that church, dilute its gospel and, with his devices, have an advantage over it—*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices* (II Cor. 2:11). Satan infiltrates churches, not to steal salvation from the saints, but to rob them of a true gospel testimony that would bring light to the lost—

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (II Cor. 4:4).

God knows that Satan is an *angel of light* and that he intends to infiltrate the visible church with *ministers of righteousness* who claim apostolic authority and pretend to have moral standards while teaching salvation by personal righteousness—

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (II Cor. 11:13-15).

In Acts 20:28-31 the Apostle Paul prepared the Ephesian elders to defend the visible church against such an infiltration. This preparation became practical and useful after Paul's departure from their presence—

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted (Rev. 2:1-3).

In contrast to the local-visible church, the mystical universal-invisible Body of Christ is made up of all believers in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ from the beginning of the church age until the rapture of the saints. The good news is that no human, demonic, nor satanic power can dissect the oneness of that body. All true Christians have entered that body through the baptism of (or *in*) the Holy Spirit—

For the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (I Cor. 12:12, 13).

The goal of a local-visible church should be to translate the oneness of the invisible church into the congregation of the local church. This ideal has never, to our

knowledge, been completely accomplished in church history because the local church must exclude from its fellowship some who are not excluded from the universal church—

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (I Cor. 5:9-13, see vss. 1-5)

But this ideal of oneness cannot be even properly attempted except through a consensus on the clarity of the saving gospel. Otherwise, we are not speaking of spiritual unity, but of mere uniformity based upon an apostate version of the gospel.

The most powerful prayers ever uttered were from the heart of Jesus Christ Himself. He it was Who petitioned the Father to make a oneness of all true believers—

...Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are...That they 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world (Jn. 17:11, 21-23).

In this sense, the departed saints in heaven and the living saints on earth are united into one invisible Body that spans heaven and earth—

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:14-16).

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:4-7).

The universal-invisible Body of Christ has one Lord, one faith and one baptism—

*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).

The one baptism is Spirit baptism, to be distinguished from all forms of ritual baptism. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and the drinking of Christ must be experienced today before water baptism and before the ordinance of the Lord's Table. This present work

has been primarily concerned with the distinction between ritual and reality. Although Christian ritual ordinances are sacred, they are only symbols and must not be viewed as imparting the saving grace of Christ. In Acts 10 the Apostle Peter was preaching the Gospel to a household of lost Gentile souls. As he was explaining the plan of salvation (Acts 10:43), his hearers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit into the invisible-universal Body of Christ—*While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word* (vs. 44). We know that this was Holy Ghost baptism from Peter's description and report of the event to the Jerusalem church:

And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 11:15, 16).

It was only after these believers were placed into the invisible-universal Body of Christ that they were asked to submit to ritual water baptism—

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:45-48a).

Thus, in the invisible-universal church, all have the one baptism of the Spirit, while some have unscriptural ritual baptism, some have scriptural water baptism, and others have no ritual baptism at all.

On the other hand, the local-visible church does not possess God's omniscience and therefore will often admit unregenerate persons into its membership based upon their "professions of faith." Thus, unlike the invisible-universal church, the local-visible church is comprised of both the saved and the lost.

Just as Spirit baptism is distinguished from ritual baptism in Scripture, the invisible-universal church must be distinguished from the local-visible church.<sup>1</sup> There are wolves and false professors in many local churches, while there are only truly born again saints in the universal church. The local church is comprised of living mortals dwelling on earth while the universal church is mostly comprised of departed saints of centuries past. Being a member of the universal does not make one a member of the local. Even the most devoted ecumenical would concede that ten busloads of Methodists cannot pull into a Presbyterian church parking lot, enter the building, vote in a new board of elders, and call for the pastor to be replaced. Membership in the universal church does not give them equal standing in the business of all local churches. The Apostle Paul told

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<sup>1</sup> There is a school of thought among many godly Baptist brethren which denies the existence of any universal church. They hold that the only Body of Christ in the NT is the local church. This position is grounded in their jealousy for the Bible doctrine of the local church, and possibly motivated by their reaction to the ecumenical movement's desire to form the universal church into a visible, earthly organization. We would ask these brethren to bear with us in this chapter as we agree with them regarding the nonexistence of a universal/visible church. These brethren do believe that there is a sense in which all NT saints are invisibly one in Christ. It is this unity to which we refer when we speak of the universal church in contrast to the local church.

the Corinthians to set up judges in the church to arbitrate between brethren rather than appealing to a court of unbelievers in the world (cf. I Cor. 6). He was speaking of a jurisdiction within one local church. A church in Indianapolis cannot set up judges which can order a member of a local church in California to pay reparations to a brother in Indiana. These judges are an alternative to civil law suits between brethren within the same local-visible church.

Almost on a weekly basis, a new leader will speak for God and proclaim that the Lord has called him to make the universal church into one functioning organization on earth, suggesting a single bank account and a unified budget. Such a project will require a moratorium regarding how the gospel should be precisely defined—of course until this leader announces what the new “true gospel” shall be. It should comfort the grieving saint to know that the Scriptures nowhere call for the universal Church to form a unified organization on earth. Any attempt to facilitate such an idea in past history has usually resulted in religious persecution and/or mass executions.

When the Bible admonishes Christians because of their divisiveness, it is addressing a local church situation—

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. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ (I Cor. 10:10-12).

Thus, Paul told the local church at Corinth that there *should be no schism in the body*, but rather an atmosphere of mutual care (I Cor. 12:25). In this context, the apostle was calling the local church a *body of Christ* as distinguished from the universal church which cannot be spiritually divided. This local church concept is illustrated by the fact that when one member suffers, all members suffer; and when one member is honored, all members are honored (I Cor. 12:25, 26). If this is a description of the universal church, then it must be affirmed that the departed saints in heaven have been suffering with mortal earthly saints since the Day of Pentecost. In such a case, heaven would not be heaven at all.

This brings us to the heart-rendering subject of the breach between varying religious groups in Christendom today. We are constantly reminded that these divisions are caused by doctrine, and, that if all religions would simply give up their dogmas, there would be nothing left to fuss about. Thus, God would be glorified. At this point, it is beneficial to be brutally honest in our observation of Scripture. In the Bible we find that doctrine (and particularly a purely defined gospel as doctrine) was the essential godly basis for any form of true spiritual unity:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

This kind of unity can never occur when the advocates of different gospels are asked to declare a moratorium on their views of salvation in order to form a world-wide, unified,

visible church. God knows that the differences among advocates of salvation by grace, salvation by sacraments, salvation by the Law of Moses, salvation by denominational affiliation, etc. are irreconcilable. This truth should not threaten the peace of a true saint.

Any attempt at unity without a clearly defined gospel of grace as the common denominator will not be a unity of God, but rather a uniformity of man. The words "division" and "contention" are part of God's definition of biblical unity. A local church needs to separate, or divide, from a gospel that cannot save, in order to unite under the gospel of Christ. Again, Paul told the brethren to *mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them* (Rom. 16:17). The gospel truth is not only the primary basis of true unity among mortal brethren, it is always a source of contention and division. Paul said: *But we preach Christ, crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness* (I Cor. 1:23). Again, Paul said: *As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and a rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed* (Rom. 9:33). The Apostle Peter said:

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence... (I Pet. 2: 7, 8a).

People are often heard to boast that they do not preach doctrine, but rather, they only preach Jesus. The Holy Spirit said that all Scripture is *profitable for doctrine* (II Tim. 3:16). How then can we preach Jesus without preaching Scripture? The Bible describes Jesus as follows: *And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority* (Mk. 1:22). The exclusiveness of the gospel has always caused division—*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (Jn. 14:6); and—*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (I Cor. 3:11); and...*for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins* (Jn. 8:24b); and finally, *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved* (Acts 4:12).

Paul wanted unity in the Corinthian church, but not one based on generic doctrine, or no doctrine at all—

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 (I Cor. 1:10).

This kind of unity can only exist when the oneness of mind is grounded upon the doctrines of Christ and the apostles rather than upon personalities—

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (I Cor. 3:3, 4)

Not only is division between a true and a false gospel profitable, sometimes division between good brethren can be harnessed by God to multiply His work, as in the case when the missionary team of the Apostle Paul split apart over the issue of John Mark—

And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches (Acts 15:36-41).

Paul could even rejoice that the gospel was being preached by people who didn't like him at all:

Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (Phil. 1:15-18).

Paul laid down several essential qualifications for biblical eldership, two of which were: to be doctrinally convincing and to be able to contend with the advocates of a false gospel (Titus 1:9-11). At Philippi, Paul found it necessary to preach the *Gospel of God with much contention* (II Thess. 2:2b).

Paul commanded the Corinthians to make a separation between believers and unbelievers regarding partnership in the Lord's work—

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (II Cor. 6:14).

Further still, the Apostle commanded separation between actual brethren, when one departed from apostolic tradition, or doctrine—

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (II Thess. 3:6).

Even in such a case as this, godly Christians must not regard such a brother as an enemy, but rather, as a victim of the enemy—

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother (II Thess. 3:14, 15).

Godly Christians must not be intimidated by the unbiblical charge that such separation is *butchering the Body of Christ*.

When the Bible defines love, there is no surrender of truth. The real love of Christ *rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth* (I Cor. 13:6). Paul said: *Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good* (Rom. 12:9). The godly Christian may never be more hated than he will be at the moment when

a so-called *apostle of love* fails to persuade him to exchange the truth of the gospel for a mission to *unify the Body of Christ*.

Saints should take comfort in the fact that no amount of human failure will divide the unity of the invisible-universal church—*For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread* (I Cor. 10:17). Paul explained that the purpose of apostolic revelation was, *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel* (Eph. 3:6). When the saint comes to the realization that the oneness of the universal church cannot be undone, the peace of God can then rule his heart—*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful* (Col. 3:15).

Regarding the transformation of the universal church into one functioning organization on earth, this will be accomplished only by Jesus Christ in the prophetic future. The wise and prudent Christian will know this as he contemplates the words of Paul:

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him (Eph. 1:9, 10).

In many major cities it is a popular trend to organize a community-wide worship and praise meeting where Christ is exalted and magnified. Such meetings usually require that the differences in gospels and doctrines be declared insignificant stumbling-blocks to true worship. God's stamp of approval is declared either through the dynamic music program, or perhaps the demonstration of God's power through miracles. It is declared that God is rejoicing to see such unity in the Body of Christ. Those churches not participating are often referred to as *dissecting* the Body of Christ, or as having *amputated* themselves from the "Body of Christ." They are called *radical, fringe, bigots, out of the mainstream*, etc., but this charge must be put to a biblical test.

All of the attributes of God, combined and focused, will not justify and save one sinner from eternal condemnation, apart from the crucifixion of Christ as the only source of redeeming grace. This means that the preaching of the simple gospel of Jesus Christ is the greatest demonstration of God's power that can be displayed on earth—

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (I Cor. 1:18).

For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake (I Thess. 1:5).

God help any of us if we think that we can call an ecumenical meeting and perform a greater demonstration of God's power than the preaching of the one true gospel of pure grace. If we could fling another milkyway across the other side of the heavens, this would not be a greater demonstration of divine power than the preaching of the cross.

The cross of Christ was the greatest demonstration of God's love for mankind, and, at the same time, the greatest demonstration of God's hatred for the sin of mankind.

The true purpose of worship is one of glorifying God through exaltation, magnification, service, and praise. There are many forms through which this may be done, but one method is ultimately more effective than all others. Paul said of himself and his companions that God had *made us able ministers of the new covenant* which places emphasis on the clear plan of salvation (II Cor. 3:6). The Apostle explained that the Old Covenant glorified God so much that Moses had to veil his face in order to keep from blinding the people when he brought the Law of Moses to them (II Cor. 3:7, 13). But Paul said that the New Covenant glorifies God much more than the Old (II Cor. 3:9). In fact, the gospel excels the glory of the Old Covenant so much that it is almost as if the Old did not glorify God at all—

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away *was* glorious, much more that which remaineth *is* glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech (II Cor. 3:10-12)

This means that if the entire human race joined hands and began to recite words of worship, magnification, exaltation, and glorification to God, they could be totally excelled by one man correctly, clearly, and compassionately pronouncing the gospel of the grace of Christ to a lost soul. God help us if we think that we have discovered a better way to worship and glorify You. God help us if we think that we can lay the truth of the gospel aside in order to unite the *universal Body of Christ* in a *true ecumenical worship service*. Jesus Christ exclaimed:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23, 24).

Rather than spending time and revenue on projects to organize the Universal Church on earth, the saint should leave that subject to prophetic fulfillment and seek to unite with a local assembly that is the most thoroughly bound to the doctrine of Jesus Christ from the Scripture, and not afraid of division resulting from the purity of a clear gospel. The Apostle John said:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (II Jn. 9-11).

John's reference to *doctrine of Christ* means primarily the gospel of Christ. Saints do not have to be in agreement on every doctrine of the NT in order to be in fellowship and communion with one another.

Taking the good news of God's saving grace to every human being is the task of every believer. If we hear of this being accomplished in another group which is not in partnership with us locally, forbid them not, but follow the example of Christ—

And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And

Jesus said unto him, Forbid *him* not: for he that is not against us is for us (Lk. 9:49, 50).

Christ did not seek them out to form a unified organization on earth, but rather rejoiced that they were out there, at least doing part of the job right. We are to thank God for anyone who preaches the gospel of grace correctly and clearly, but we are to seek organic unity with brethren who desire to carry out the entire Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Though the invisible Body of Christ is universal, and individual earthly members of that Body have been spiritually gifted for ministry (Eph. 4:7; I Cor. 12:7; I Pet. 4:10), the use of these gifts were to be governed by the visible church on earth. But the visible church on earth is the local self-governing church. A visible church in one city cannot have jurisdiction over the order and government of a visible church in another city. If a woman in the Corinthian church had the gift of prophecy, order required that she have her head covered while prophesying (I Cor. 11:5). If a member of the Corinthian church had the gift of tongues, he was not to use it while someone else was speaking in tongues, and then only when an interpreter was present (I Cor. 14:27, 28). These gifts were to be regulated by the local church so that all things would be done *unto edifying* (I Cor. 14:26b), and *decently and in order* (I Cor. 14:39b). Earl Radmacher notes:

The word *order* occurs four times in connection with the proper direction and control of church affairs. Twice it is used in relation to the regulation of the service of worship by the church (cf. I Cor. 11:34; 14:40) and twice it is used in connection with the organization of the church (cf. Col. 2:5; Titus 1:5). The Greek term for order is *taxis* from the verb *tasso*. It was primarily a military term which was in common use to express the most precise and exact order. It was commonly used of "drawing up in rank and file, order or disposition of an army." Again, it was the "battle array, order of battle." This order is to be evidenced in their use of spiritual gifts and in the application of the principles of church government...

The principle of order in the use of the gifts was applied by Paul to the Corinthian Church because of their disorderly use of one of the gifts. He rebuked them for their self-elation because of the possession of special gifts and for the confusion occasioned thereby in the services of the church. He reminds them that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (I Cor. 14:33)...

Behind all of these statements one can see the symmetry, beauty, decorum, and orderliness of the body of Christ which is to have its manifestation in local churches, especially with regard to the use of the gifts...<sup>2</sup>

That these gifts are primarily for the edification of saints in the local-visible church (Eph. 4:11, 12) is evident in the fact that earthly saints do not have a ministry of edification to dead and departed saints in heaven, of whom most of the universal Church is comprised. Therefore, no one is the bishop, elder or pastor of the universal church. The

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<sup>2</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature Of The Church* (Portland Oregon: Western Baptist Press, 1972), pp. 348, 349.

universal church does not have a human government on earth with a capital city and jurisdiction over all local churches in the world.

Church historians will remember when the medieval church attempted to govern world Christendom as a universal-visible body. Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) issued the *Dictatus Papae* (“Dictate of the Pope”) claiming:

That the Roman pontiff alone can with right be called universal.  
That he alone may use the imperial insignia.  
That of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet.  
That it may be permitted to him to depose emperors.  
That he himself may be judged by no one.  
That he who is not at peace with the Roman Church shall not be considered catholic.  
That he may absolve subjects from their fealty to wicked men.<sup>3</sup>

When the mortal-visible church on earth is declared to be the universal church with one baptism, then the baptism of the Spirit and ritual baptism are considered to be the same incident (cf. Acts 10:47). Thus, if the “universal governor” of the visible church on earth could withhold the sacraments from a “Christian”, he could shut that person out of heaven. In the medieval church, when one was excommunicated and anathematized he was indeed barred from heaven’s gates. This is what occurred in the clash with Gregory VII and Henry IV. Gregory excommunicated Henry, deposed him, and absolved his subjects from their oaths of allegiance. Thus, Henry’s German nobles revolted and Henry

was consigned to eternal hell by the governor of the “universal church.” In January, 1077 Henry appeared before Gregory at a castle in the Apennines called Canossa. There, he stood barefoot in the snow for three days, begging forgiveness until Gregory said: *We loosed the chain of the anathema and at length received him into the favor and communion and into the lap of the Holy Mother Church.*<sup>4</sup>

If the visible church on earth is the universal Body of Christ with a human government, then Gregory VII was correct. But he was incorrect. When order and government is given to Christians on earth, the jurisdiction is within a local church. A spiritually gifted saint does not have a divine right to take the platform of just any church and then order the pastor to stand down. Spiritual gifts are not ordered by a human governor of the universal church, but by the jurisdiction of the local church. God does not today grant individual saints a divine jurisdiction to impose themselves at will upon any local church.

Therefore, we must reject the charge that we are placing ourselves outside the universal church, and therefore outside of salvation itself, if we refuse to submit to the ecumenical movement with its generic, pluralistic gospel. The evangelism of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and the apostles required the turning away from a false gospel in order to embrace the saving gospel. Adding the finished work of Christ to the belief that circumcision and the Mosaic Law will save is not the gospel of Christ. We cannot present a saving gospel by adding Christ to the belief in reincarnation, the five pillars of

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<sup>3</sup> Harry J. Carroll, Jr., *et al.*, *The Development of Civilization: A Documentary History of Politics, Society, and Thought*, I (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1961), pp. 382-383.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in J. H. Robinson, *Readings in European History*, I (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1904), p. 144.

the faith of Islam, the worship of the gods of the pantheon, etc. One must embrace the grace and mercy of God provided by the finished work of Christ alone—*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith* (Heb. 12:2a).

We have purposely avoided a discussion of the debate regarding mode of baptism. Though this is an important issue, we have focused on discerning the gospel of grace, which does not include ritual baptism under any mode. Our baptism is not designed to instruct us to embrace Christ by faith, it is our profession that we have already been instructed and have embraced Christ by faith.

We conclude this chapter with an exhortation to the reader to make certain that he/she has laid aside any hope of personal righteousness, sacraments, church membership, etc. contributing anything to his/her right to possess eternal life. His/her faith must have at some moment been directed away from that which cannot save to salvation by grace accomplished solely by the finished work of Christ on the cross. This must be a 100 percent free gift. The only thing we contribute is our sin. In fact, we did not even contribute that for it was taken from us by Christ and the penalty of it born by Him on His cross. This gift of forgiveness of sin and eternal life is a standing offer to anyone who will receive it from the Lord. The moment you realize you are morally and spiritually bankrupt before God and say *yes* to His offer of this free gift, you have the promise that it is yours forever (I Jn. 5:13). If this has not happened to you, follow Him by receiving that unspeakable gift at this very moment—

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.