

# The Harvester



## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



Volume 31

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### Steven Virgil Walling Completing His Studies!

Steve is a son of Ira and Ada Walling, long-time members of the Eagle Lake church of Christ, where Steve was brought up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” and once served as a deacon. Steve came to the school from the North Jackson Avenue church of Christ in Bartow, Florida. He was working as a sales rep for an automotive paint company, but found himself without a secular job when the economy turned downward. Preaching was something he always wanted to do, and the Lord providentially provided the means for him to receive training. Thanks for your support! Steve is currently serving as the preacher for the Springhead church of Christ in Plant City, Florida, and hopes to continue in that service in a fuller way after his graduation. He and his wife, Shelly, have three children, Cody, Dustin, and Emily. Graduation will be held Sunday, May 8, 2011, immediately following evening services at South Florida Avenue! All are welcome to attend!

## Is “For the Remission of Sins” The Only Characteristic of Scriptural Baptism?

By Brian R. Kenyon

It seems that a very prevalent discussion in churches of Christ these days is whether or not to accept the denominational baptisms with which some are coming who want to place membership in particular churches of Christ. Some are being accepted into full fellowship with their denominational baptisms. The reason given is that the person says the denomination from which he or she came baptized “for the remission of sins.” It is reasoned, “Since New Testament baptism is ‘for the remission of sins’ and since my denomination baptizes ‘for the remission of sins,’ then my denominational baptism is the same as New Testament baptism.” Is this really true?

From the outset, let it be understood that when Peter’s inspired imperatives, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) are properly understood, “for the remission of sins” is a sufficient characteristic of Scriptural baptism. However, to properly understand “for the remission of sins” in relation to baptism, one must also properly understand “repent” and “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Do denominations who claim to baptize “for the remission of sins” properly teach “repentance” and “in the name of Jesus Christ”? Baptisms similar to New Testament baptism are not necessarily the same! More about this later.

## Consider the Baptism of John

If “for the remission of sins” were the only characteristic for Scriptural baptism, there would have been nothing wrong with John’s baptism in Acts 19:1-7. Before examining Acts 19, let us briefly consider some facts relating to the baptism of John: (1) Jesus and John preached the same message (Mt. 3:1-2; Mk. 1:14-15 cf. Mt. 21:23-27); (2) Jesus baptized others with the same baptism John did (Jn. 4:1-2); (3) John’s baptism was “for the remission of sins” (Mk. 1:4-5; Lk. 3:3); (4) those baptized with John’s baptism knew their sins were forgiven (Lk. 1:76-77 cf. Heb. 9:15; Rom. 3:25); (5) John’s ministry, including his baptism, made his contemporary Jews ready for the kingdom (Lk. 1:17); and (6) those who rejected the baptism of John rejected God (Lk. 7:28-30). To be sure, the baptism of John had its place in God’s plan. However, it was nailed to the cross, along with the rest of the old law, and replaced by the baptism Jesus commissioned before He ascended to the right hand of God (Mt. 28:18-19; Mk. 16:15-16 cf. Acts 1:9-11).

The events recorded in Acts 18-19 took place about twenty years after the crucifixion of Christ and subsequent establishment of the church some fifty days later. Apollos was a very powerful preacher who was “eloquent...mighty in the scriptures...instructed in the way of the Lord; and...fervent in spirit” (Acts 18:24-25a), but he only knew the baptism of John (Acts 18:25b). There are many unanswered questions concerning Apollos and why he only knew the baptism of John, but the scope of this article does

not permit discussion on these at this point.

One truth we know is that when Paul later came to Ephesus, something about those “certain disciples” prompted his inspired question, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:1). This led to further dialog that revealed the impossibility of their baptism be-

ing Scriptural. The reason why they never heard of the Holy Spirit in connection with baptism was because they were baptized “unto John’s baptism” (Acts 19:3). The apostle summarized the difference between the two baptisms, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). John’s baptism—even though it was immersion in water based upon repentance and “for the remission of sins” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3)—was not the same as the baptism Jesus commanded for us today (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16 cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5)!

The main difference pointed out by Paul was that John’s baptism was based upon belief on “him which should come after him [John the Baptist].” This one who “should come after” was Christ. In other words, John’s baptism looked *forward* to the redemptive work of Christ, whereas the baptism Jesus authorized for us today looks back on Him who *has come*! How could people (like the Ephesians in Acts 19:1-3) have a Scriptural baptism when they were baptized with a baptism that looked *forward* to the redemptive work of Christ at a time well after the redemptive work of Christ was complete?

Note the relevance concerning what we must believe as a prerequisite to Scriptural baptism in Romans 10:9-10,

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

It would be impossible to believe that God “hath raised” (aorist tense—completed action in the past) Jesus from the dead according to John’s baptism, which, again, looked forward to what Christ would do in redemption rather than what Romans 10:9 enjoins—looking backwards to what Christ already accomplished! Is it any wonder, then, that upon hearing the truth, the twelve Ephesian men were baptized with the correct baptism (Acts 19:5-7)?

## Consider “For the Remission of Sins”

Now, back to the idea that a denominational baptism “for the remission of sins” is necessarily the same as the baptism Jesus commanded for us. Since the explicit statement “for the remission of sins” is connected with Jesus’ Great Commission baptism in only one verse, let us examine Peter’s instruction, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

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First, in order to properly understand “for the remission of sins” in Acts 2:38, one must also understand what Peter meant by the command to “repent” in Acts 2:38. The two imperatives in the verse are joined by the coordination conjunction “and,” which means that both “repent” and “be baptized” are of equal value “for the remission of sins.” One cannot have remission of sins without repenting *and* being baptized! Repentance for the sinner outside of Christ involves turning away from sin and being converted to Christ (cf. Lk. 24:47; Acts 3:19; 17:30). Any “baptism” that is not preceded by true repentance, even if it is said to be “for the remission of sins,” cannot be Scriptural baptism!

Second, some teach that the word “for” in “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) means “because of.” The classic example is to hear, “Jesse James was wanted *for* murder, which obviously means *because of* murder; therefore, the word *for* in Acts 2:38 also means *because of*.” Such an idea, however, flies in the face, not only of the original language of the New Testament, but of other passages where the phrase is used. Note Mark 1:4, “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance *for the remission of sins*” (cf. Lk. 3:3, emphasis added). Did John baptize because people *already had* remission of sins? Of course not! He baptized so they would after being baptized! Note also Matthew 26:28, as Jesus took the cup while instituting the Lord’s Supper, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins*” (emphasis added). Was Jesus about to shed His blood because people *already had* remission of sins? Of course not! That would have meant Jesus did not have to die! That would have made the cross meaningless! A denominational “baptism” may be said to be “for the remission of sins,” but if by that they mean it is “an outward sign of an inward grace” because sins were already forgiven, then that baptism cannot be Scriptural!

Third, there are elements, some of which are not explicitly mentioned in Acts 2:38, but are involved in the total teaching of the Bible that are important to the proper understanding of “for the remission of sins” in connection with baptism. Though there is much discussion among brethren as to the meaning of “the gift of the Holy Ghost,” it is clear that the Holy Spirit is involved in Scriptural baptism. Was that not a major indication that the Ephesians were baptized with an unscriptural baptism (Acts 19:2-3)? Also, Scriptural baptism involves being baptized into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). At the time of Acts 2:38, there were no “Christian denominations.” Thus, in many ways, there was not the confusion about the body of Christ that exists today—it was distinct! Can a baptism that promises entrance into a body different from the body of Christ be the baptism Jesus authorized for us today?

## Consider the One Seeking Membership

What do we do about those who come out of denominations seeking to place membership with the congregations of which we are members? We must first realize that God does not require perfect knowledge before one can be baptized, for if that were the case, no one would qualify! Having said that, though, we must also realize that Scriptural baptism is absolutely necessary to be in fellowship with God and one another (Rom. 6:3-4). Thus, we must find out whether or not their baptisms are Scriptural!

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To find out whether a person's baptism is Scriptural, while at the same time allowing that person to arrive at the truth, asking the following questions before even opening the Bible works great. These questions are not original with me (they are adapted from Earl Edwards), and they can be asked casually, not in "interrogation mode." (1) Have you ever made a commitment to Christ? (2) If yes, at what age? (3) At that time, did you make a confession? (4) If yes, what was that confession? (5) Have you been baptized? (6) How were you baptized (describe the action)? (7) How long after your commitment to Christ until you were baptized? (8) For what purpose were you baptized? (9) Were you saved before baptism or at baptism? After these questions are answered, then compare the person's answers with what the Scriptures teach. If the Scriptures are studied first, people will often justify their denominational baptism as being Scriptural because, as a general rule, people do not want to admit they have been fooled. A person will be more honest with the questions before opening the Bible. In my experience, the only person who answered these questions Scripturally came from a conservative Christian Church. Every other denominational person I have asked, answered at least one unscripturally, and later knew why his baptism was unscriptural.



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