

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 3:7-14

Assemblies

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Confession Is Required

Depending on who you talk to in the religious world, you will receive different answers on what is required to have eternal life—even if we only consider those who believe in Jesus. Some will say nothing at all is required; others that faith alone is sufficient. Of the latter group, there are those who say that must confess Jesus is the Christ, but when pressed on the matter, would not say it is essential to salvation. Faith alone will do, so they claim. Faith is necessary (Jn. 8:24; 3:16). However, faith alone is not enough.

Paul wrote, “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9, 10). This confession is made with the mouth. It is not merely a way of living as some want to make it. We do “confess” our belief in God by the way we live, but we must also verbally assent to the Lordship of Jesus.

An example of confession leading to salvation is found in Acts 8. The Ethiopian eunuch was taught the gospel (Acts 8:35). When he and Philip came to water, he asked, “What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Philip told him he must believe, at which point the Ethiopian confessed his belief—“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

The confession of Jesus Christ is not some type of word magic. The seven sons of Sceva thought there was something special in saying the name “Jesus,” but found out differently (Acts 19:13-16). Saying Jesus is the Christ must come from the heart, a deep, genuine conviction that He is the one and only Savior. Without this confession, you cannot be saved.

Romans 10:9, 10, is not the “sinner’s prayer.” Confession with the mouth is not

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merely in a prayer uttered to God. Yes, we may express to God that we believe in His Son. However, the confession leading to salvation is not a statement made in prayer. If it was, Saul of Tarsus would have been saved before Ananias came to him—but he was not. There is no doubt that Saul believed in Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6). It is an indisputable fact that he was praying for three days (Acts 9:11). Yet, when Ananias came to him, he still had sins that needed to be washed away (Acts 22:12-16). Do you think Saul acknowledge Jesus as the Savior in any of his prayers over a three day period? Likewise, do you think he told others—his traveling companions—that he believed in Jesus?

Sometimes people wonder about confessing sins before being baptized. We know Christians are to confess their sins (Jas. 5:16; 1 Jn. 1:7-10). However, alien sinners are not required to tell of their sins. Why? First, everyone already knows they are sinners; and that is the reason they are being baptized. Second, if a man obeys the gospel when he is 50 years old, could he remember all of the sins he committed?

Confession of Jesus as the Christ is required of all who want to become Christians. For those who truly believe in Jesus, this is not a problem. Too, their conviction will lead them on to obey the commands of the One whom they confessed, namely to repent and be baptized (Lk. 24:47; Mk. 16:16).

- Steven F. Deaton

Baptist “Pastor” Wants Church Discipline

The AgapePress recently reported that a Baptist “pastor” in Florida wants the Southern Baptist Convention to accurately count its membership. The SBC claims 16 million members, but the article stated only about 32 percent actually attend services in a given week. It went on to say,

... he is adamant that church discipline is needed throughout the denomination.

The Book of James warns Christians not to be deceived as those who only hear the Word of God but do not put its precepts into practice, Ascol points out. He says the words of Jesus “could not be simpler or clearer in Matthew, Chapter 18, verses 15-18, where He tells us the steps of church discipline;

yet you probably couldn’t find one in a thousand of Southern Baptist churches right now that are intentionally and conscientiously, regularly practicing church discipline.”

At his own church, Ascol notes, elders interview prospective members and also require their attendance in a new members class. He suggests that measures like these are necessary for church discipline and need to be taken in order to ensure integrity in Christian church membership.

A few observations are in order.

1. The Baptist “pastor” can see what some of our brethren cannot see; namely that church discipline is needed. The Bible teaches that local churches are to regulate their membership. It is required to examine those who want to be members (Acts 9:26-28; 20:28-32). It is also required to disfellowship those who are wayward and impenitent (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Thes. 3:1-14). Both of these actions help keep a congregation pure.

2. The Baptist “pastor” has a doctrinal conflict. He says he wants churches to practice discipline, but does not believe God does. In other words, he expects churches to follow the New Testament teaching of kicking out sinners. Yet, he does not believe God will bar any “believer” from heaven, regardless of the sins they have committed—the doctrine of once saved always saved. If God will not discipline His erring children, the why should churches? Also, this puts the Baptist “pastor” in a pickle of saying that a Baptist believer who sins is not good enough for the Baptist church, but is fit for heaven.

- Steven F. Deaton

Making No Progress?

Are you troubled by the lack of progress you are making? Could it be that there is sin in your camp? Israel had sin in the camp that kept them from going forward in Canaan (Josh. 7). When it was removed, they were able to press on. It may be that your lack of spiritual growth is due to a sin in your life. Your relationship to your husband or wife may be hindered because you are and/or your spouse are in sin. Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith, be determined to remove all sin, and then press on.

- Steven F. Deaton