

## HOW TO ENTER THE CHURCH

By: L. O. Sanderson

The church of the Lord, which includes all those purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), is also designated as the body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22), and the family in heaven and earth (Eph. 3:15), its members being children of God (Rom. 8:16, 17). That process by which we are united with the body and born into the family must be the same means by which we enter the Church.

The phrase and practice of “joining the church” is unknown to the Bible, and the matter of “opening the doors of the church” is even more foreign to the Scriptures. Christ, the good shepherd of the flock, which is the Church (Acts. 20:28), is the door. No one enters but by Jesus Christ! To enter by Christ, the door, certainly demands that we enter by his authority, for all authority is given unto him (Matt. 28:18), and by his requirements; for no man comes except he be drawn, and he is drawn by teaching (John 6:44, 45; Rom. 10:13-17). Furthermore, Christ, who has all power, gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom, the Church (Matt. 16:19), and Peter opened the doors of the Church on Pentecost to the Jews (Acts 2), and at the house of Cornelius to the Gentiles (Acts 10). The doors have not been closed since, and certainly could not be opened when they are already open. In scriptural fact, God adds to the Church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24) when we have met the requirements for entrance.

### THE REQUIREMENTS OF CHRIST

Surely no one doubts the right of Christ to make the terms of admission, since the Church belongs to him and all authority is given to him. Hence, our interest is: What does He require? He is the door, and we must enter in harmony with His will.

*Faith is required.* Jesus said (John 8:24): “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Again: “He that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:16). We must believe, for “without faith it is impossible to please God”. (Heb. 11:6). Faith is the first step toward righteousness (Rom. 10:10), and, necessarily, the first step toward the Church.

*Repentance is commanded.* Christ requires that we must “repent”, or “all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). Repentance is a change of will (Matt. 21:28-31) and leads to life (Acts 11:18). It is but reasonable that God now “commandeth all men every where to repent”.

*Confession of Christ is urged.* Peter set an example (Matt. 16:16), for which Christ pronounced him blessed, and Christ himself promised that “whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 15:32; Luke 12:8). Confession with the mouth leads to salvation (Rom. 10:10), and must, therefore, precede the saved state.

*Baptism is enjoined.* Christ, being baptized himself, has plainly set our example (Matt. 3:13-16). Baptism was the first act on beginning his short life’s work. His last instructions (and surely we have respect for his last words) were: “Go, . . . preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16:15, 16). “Go, . . . make disciples of all

the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:19, 20) These are the requirements of Christ.

### **BAPTIZED INTO THE BODY**

The Church is the body, and the body is the Church. In one Spirit (or by the authority of the same Spirit) we are “baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ is to be in his body, and we are “baptized into Christ” \*Gal. 3:27). One cannot enter any church claiming Christian faith without baptism of some sort. Christ, the door of the flock, requires baptism on our part to enter his own body, the church.

### **BORN INTO THE FAMILY**

The Church is the family of God, and certainly it is by birth that we enter the family, naturally or spiritually. We cannot enter the kingdom of God, the Church, without rebirth. To be born again is to be born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). Let “Spirit” mean *Spirit* and “water” mean *water*. We are begotten by the Spirit, the word of God (1 Cor. 4:15; James 1:18; Luke 8:11), and we come forth from the watery grave a newborn creature (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27; 2 Cor. 5:17). Thus we are born *both* of water and the Spirit. When we are born again, we have no need to join the family -- we are already in it. When the Spirit by his words leads us to be baptized into the body of Christ, the family of God, we are then children of God and should never join anything else.

### **THE APOSTLES UNDERSTOOD THIS**

Peter, to whom the keys of the kingdom were given, understood the requirements of Christ, and so in opening, as it were, the door to the assembly of God, uttered this command: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” (Acts 2:38) What Peter bound on earth is bound in heaven (Matt. 16:19); therefore, repentance and baptism are bound in heaven! When an entrance was permitted the Gentiles (Acts 10), Peter “commanded them to be baptized” (verse 48). He commanded them because Christ commanded him (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, understood the will of Christ. He taught that we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27); that we are baptized into the body (1 Cor. 12:13); and that we are buried with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-6). Certainly the act of baptism, according to Paul, was to be preceded by faith (Eph. 3:12) and repentance (Acts 26:20). He also urged confession in the strongest terms: if we do not confess Christ here, we will be forced to do so at the end of the way (Phil 2:11; Rom. 14:11).

Others understood the terms. Philip required faith and baptism on the part of the eunuch (Acts 8:35-39), and Ananias urged a believing, repenting Saul to “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins” (Acts 22:16).

### **OBEYING THE GOSPEL**

Christ made the necessary sacrifice of His own precious blood; He is the one door to fellowship with God; He has given all authority; He has given the simplest but most representative requirements. God gave his only begotten Son; Christ died, was buried, and arose again; the Spirit revealed, and it is ours to obey!

God will take vengeance on those who obey not the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8, 9). There is but one gospel, and the wrath of God is wreaked on those who change it (Gal. 1:6-9). Those who are changed from servants of Satan to the servants of righteousness have "obeyed from the heart" a form of that gospel (Rom. 6:17). The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). We cannot obey the doctrine, but we can obey a form of it -- and that is done in baptism (Rom. 6:3-6).

To obey the form without faith would not please God. To be baptized without repentance would not be acceptable. To fail to confess Christ will bring His denial of us before God. Our conclusion must be: By faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (on our part), and the blood of Christ (on God's part), we enter God's family, the body of Christ, the Church of the Lord, God doing the adding (Acts 2:47).