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Churches of Christ

salute you



THE CHAIN OF TRUTH

HERALD OF TRUTH

The Chain of Truth

James D. Willeford

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The Lord has so arranged his truths that they may be compared to the links in a chain. Each link is a part of the chain, and no link can be removed without breaking the chain.

Someone has said, "No chain is stronger than its weakest link," and that is true; but I am glad to say that in God's chain of truth there are no weak links. Not one of the Lord's commands is unimportant or unnecessary. Every command He has given is for our own good, and everything He says must be taken seriously. Isaiah said, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken." (Isa. 1:2). Christ says we must not add to his word and we must not take anything from it. (Rev. 22:18,19.)

In our lesson today we shall have quite a bit to say about the Lord's command to baptize all nations. We are stressing this command because so many religious people have broken God's chain of truth by denying the necessity of baptism. Yet baptism links us directly to Christ. Some admit that it is a command of the Lord, but they say it is not too important. As though we have any right to say that some of God's commands are important and some are not! Frankly, I cannot understand that type of reasoning for no command was ever given that was not intended to be obeyed. The very purpose in giving a command is that it should be obeyed. Otherwise, a command becomes mere advice—unnecessary advice at that!

In our study at this time I believe we can see the relation that baptism sustains to God, and to His other commands. As we study the testament of Christ, we see that baptism is linked with faith in God's chain of truth. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk. 16:16). In this passage the Lord connects belief and baptism with the coordinate conjunction "and." We are all aware of the fact that coordinate conjunctions connect words, phrases, and clauses of equal rank. Jesus did not say "He that believeth shall be saved," or "He that is baptized shall be saved," but "He that believeth AND is baptized shall be saved." There is no question but that Jesus is talking about salvation from past sins for he is here giving his apostles the great commission which they were to preach in converting all nations. In that commission He linked together belief and baptism, and He made one as necessary to salvation as the other. If the Lord had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall receive a million dollars" every person listening to me would have understood Him. No one would say, "He means that the minute we believe He will give us the million dollars."

In the chain of truth the Lord also linked repentance with baptism. Through his inspired apostle He told the Jews to "Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for

the remission of sins." (ACTS 2:38.) Again we have the coordinate conjunction "and" used. This time the Lord used it to link together baptism and repentance. Thus both repentance and baptism are necessary to bring about the remission of our sins. If one is necessary to our salvation so is the other for the Lord has linked them in his chain of truth.

Some who dislike the Lord's command about baptism make a play on the English word "for," and they suggest that it means "because of." They illustrate it by saying that a man is put in jail for stealing a car. This means he is put in jail because he stole the car. There is a scriptural answer to this quibble. In Matt. 26:28 Christ said when he instituted the Lord's supper, "this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." In this passage the Lord used the same word FOR that he used in Acts 2:38. Did Jesus mean that he shed his blood because the sins of the world were already remitted? To ask the question is to answer it. When Mr. Goodspeed, a former professor in the University of Chicago, and a member of a religious communion which teaches that baptism is performed after the remission of sins, came to Acts 2:38, he translated it, "Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ in order to have your sins forgiven." (Goodspeed's Translation of the New Testament.)

In the chain of truth the Lord linked together baptism and the confession of our faith in Christ. When the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized, the inspired evangelist said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" (Acts 8:37.) In writing to the Christians in Rome Paul said, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10.) Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32.) The only confession we have a scriptural right to make is that we believe Christ to be the Son of God. This confession must be made before baptism for it is unto or in the direction of salvation. Thus the Lord linked together baptism and the good confession.

In the chain of truth the Father has connected baptism with the death, burial, and the resurrection of Christ. The Holy Spirit pointed out to the Christians of the first century that they were made free from sin when they had "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered them." (Rom. 6:17,18.) In writing to the Corinthians the apostle Paul made it clear that the doctrine which he delivered through the scriptures consisted of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. (I Cor. 15:1-4.) The early disciples were made free from sin when they obeyed the form of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This was done when they died to the love of sin, were buried with Christ in baptism, and were raised with

him to walk in newness of life. By inspiration Paul said to Christians, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:3-5.)

When a person is buried in the watery grave as Christ was buried in the earth, and is then raised from the grave as Christ was raised from the tomb, he portrays the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. This is why we should all be immersed for there is no other way to obey a form of the death, burial, and resurrection of God's Son. And when we remember that we are made free from sin only when we have obeyed this form, we can see how important it is to be scripturally baptized.

In the Lord's chain of truth he has linked together baptism and the remission of sins. The Holy Spirit directed Peter to tell the Jews that they must "Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38.) In this passage repentance and baptism sustain the same relation to the remission of sins. Surely it is clear that if it is necessary for us to repent before the Lord will remit our sins, then it is necessary for us to be baptized before he will remit them. In this passage the Lord linked baptism and the remission of sins in a cause and effect sequence; and what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

The Lord not only joined baptism and the remission of sins, but He did it in such a way that baptism precedes the forgiveness of sins. When a person truly obeys the Lord's command that he be baptized his reason for doing so is that he may obtain the remission of sins.

As we study the chain of truth further, we learn that the Lord has linked baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost the apostles informed the people of Israel that they must "repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins" to obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has never promised the gift of his Spirit to a soul who refuses to be baptized for the remission of sins.

Baptism is the only command of Christ with which he has specifically connected the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28:19.) Every command given to

the Lord's people has the sanction and the stamp of approval of God, Christ and the Spirit but the command to be baptized is the only one with which the Son of God in so many words connected the name of the sacred Three.

You may ask, "In what way is baptism connected with the name of God?" It is linked with God because it is a part of his gospel. Paul said that gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. (Rom. 1:16,17.) The only question that should concern us is whether or not baptism is a part of the gospel. If it is, it is a part of the righteousness of God; and no man can partake fully of God's righteousness until he obeys this command of the Lord. In scriptural baptism, Christ does the baptizing through his disciples. (John 4:12.) The person being baptized is not replacing his salvation in the hands of men, and he is not saving himself. He is submitting to the righteousness of God. Christ himself was baptized to fulfill God's righteousness. By divine inspiration Paul said that when we are buried with Christ in baptism we have faith in the working of God. (Col. 2:12.) Our faith is not in the water, nor in our own merit, but in the righteousness of God. This forever precludes the possibility of our boasting that we saved ourselves.

My friends, baptism and God are as closely connected as God and his righteousness. We cannot have a spiritual connection with God, nor partake of His righteousness without submitting to his command that we be baptized for the remission of our sins.

Another interesting question is, "In what way is baptism linked with Christ?" It is linked with Christ in that it is a part of his Great Commission. He commissioned his people to teach and to baptize all nations, and he becomes the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him. (Heb. 5:9.)

Baptism is also connected with Christ in that it puts us into Him. To the people of Galatia the Lord said, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27.) Surely a command of the Lord that is said to put us into Christ is essential to our salvation from past sins. We cannot have the blessings of Christ until we put him on in baptism.

Christ thought enough of this command of God that He walked sixty miles from Nazareth to the Jordan River to be baptized of John. He did it to obey His Father for He said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of Him that sent me." (John 6:38.)

When Christ gave the Great Commission, He said baptism is to be performed not only in the name of the Father, and of the Son, but also in the name of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is linked with the Holy Spirit inasmuch as He guided the apostles in their

teaching, and writing. Christ promised that the Spirit would guide his apostles into all the truth. (John 16:13.) When they preached the gospel it was the Holy Spirit who gave them the message. (Matt. 10:19,20.) Therefore the Holy Spirit of God directed that men of all nations must be baptized in obedience to the will of the Father.

In the plan of salvation the Lord has linked together baptism and the blood of Christ. The apostle John says, "The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sins." (I John 1:7.) The apostle Peter says, "baptism doth also now save us." (I Pet. 3:21.) Another apostle of Christ tells us when we are saved by the blood of Christ through baptism. He says, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sins, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Rom. 6:17,18.) In the first century people were made free from their sins when they obeyed the gospel of Christ. A part of that gospel was the Lord's command that we be baptized for the remission of past sins.

In the chain of truth the Son of God has linked together His blood, His command to be baptized, and obedience to His word. What God hath joined together, let not man break asunder. When he said, "And they made his grave with the wicket." der.

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