

# THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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## "You Expect Me to Believe That?"

In the beginning there was nothing. And suddenly for no reason nothing exploded and created everything. You expect me to believe that?

At some point, by chance the right chemicals happened to float together at just the right moment to be struck by an electrical charge and become life. You expect me to believe that?

Somewhere two non-human mothers each gave birth to a human child. They were born at the same time and in the same place, one was male and one was female. These two new "humans" gave birth to the human race. You expect me to believe that?

One of the descendants of these first humans was born with a knowledge of right and wrong. No longer driven by instinct, this person suddenly was making decisions based on a morality for which there is no real explanation. You expect me to believe that?

I'm sorry. I don't have that much blind faith. It's all just too farfetched to be anything more than a fairy tale. I can't believe intelligent people claim it is "science" (cf. I Timothy 6:20).

**"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"** (Genesis 1: 1). I can believe that without stretching my imagination into the realm of the impossible. The universe was created by an all-powerful, all-knowing God. That I can believe.

✍️ Phil Gear

## If Baptism Is Optional . . .

That water baptism is a part of NT teaching cannot be denied. Christ taught it. The apostles and other inspired men taught it and sinners submitted to it. However, many (including those who practice it) minimize the importance of baptism in claiming it not essential to one's salvation. To them, it is an OPTIONAL thing, to be received or rejected without eternal consequences one way or the other. If they are right, then certain other things must necessarily follow.

If baptism is optional, then observing the teaching of Christ is optional because He teaches that *"he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). If one could be saved without doing what Jesus says about baptism, then what of the faith required in the same verse? Remember, God says, *"hear ye him"* (Matthew 17:5); and *"to Him shall ye hearken in all things"* (Acts 3:22). However, if observing and abiding in the teaching of Christ (2 John 9) cannot be optional, then neither can the baptism contained in His teaching.

Further, Jesus plainly tells the apostles to *"make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you..."* (Matthew 28:19,20). His instructions include teaching and baptism. Which is optional? Also, note that the apostles were to teach men to observe what Christ commanded. The apostles taught baptism, therefore it was among those things commanded by Christ. (comp. Acts 2:38; 10:48; Romans 6:3-ff; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27). If baptism is optional, then keeping the commandments of Christ is optional! Recall in John 14:15 Jesus says, *"If you love me, ye will keep my commandments"*. Is it possible to show love for Christ while regarding His commandments as optional and not keeping His word (v.23)?

Again, if baptism is optional, then obeying truth is optional. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). What the apostles and other inspired men set forth concerning baptism was a part of that gospel truth. Among other things, this truth teaches that men put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) and that newness of life begins at baptism (John 3:3-5; Romans 6:4). THAT'S THE GOSPEL TRUTH! Can men please God without newness of life and without putting on Christ? — are these optional matters? To reject this truth is to reject the God who gives it (1 Thessalonians 4:8) and Paul depicts the fate of all who do not obey it (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9).

Finally, if it makes no difference whether one is baptized, then it makes no difference whether one receives forgiveness of sins. Through Peter, God shows that remission of sins follows repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Acts 22:16 teaches that sins are washed away in baptism. Christ himself shows that being saved (forgiven) comes after faith expresses itself in baptism (Mark 16:16). This is why God says that baptism saves as (1 Peter 3:21). Nothing necessary to the salvation of man can be optional. God, in many ways, says baptism is needful. Will you receive it?

✍️ Dan S. Shipley



## "COME AND SEE"

When Philip told Nathanael, *"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"* (John 1:45), Nathanael responded by asking, *"Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Philip's reply to Nathanael's question serves as the title of this article. He did not rebuke him for his question or doubt. He simply said, *"Come and see."* Nathanael did as Philip instructed and when Jesus presented the evidence to him he said, *"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel"* (John 1:49).

The answer Philip gave to Nathanael's question on this occasion has been God's answer to honest doubt through the years. Be willing to give an honest hearing to the evidence. This was the answer Jesus gave to Thomas when he said, *"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). When Jesus later appeared to Thomas He did not rebuke Thomas for not believing the words of the other apostles, instead He said, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing"* (John 20:27). He was calling upon Thomas to examine the evidence, i.e., "Come and see." Upon doing so Thomas was compelled to declare, *"My Lord and my God."* What other conclusion could any honest individual reach?

Today, as we seek to follow and glorify Christ in all we teach and do we encounter those who question and doubt the things we teach. Some who offer these questions and doubts are like the Jews in John 9 who would not believe even though the evidence was presented to them. However, I am convinced that there are still many like Nathanael and Thomas who are honest in their questioning and doubts. To these, we give the same answer as Philip and Jesus, "Come and see." Come and examine the things we

teach and practice in the light of God's word. Be like those noble Bereans who *"received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

The Lord does not expect people to blindly follow Him with no basis to their faith. He wants us to have that honest and good heart (Luke 8:15) that will hear the word and bring forth fruit in our lives.

If the Lord expects us to examine the evidence before believing on Him how much more should we expect people to examine what we teach and practice in the light of God's word before they accept it as truth. How willing are you to have what you believe and practice in religion put to the test? How willing are you to respond to the request "Show me that in the Bible." Some seem to think that if something is said often enough and long enough then it must be true. So, we have individuals saying, "One church is as good as another;" "it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere," or "we're all going to the same place (heaven), we are just traveling different roads." I know you have heard these statements (and many others like them) but are they true? The only way to determine whether they are true is to examine them in the light of what the word of God teaches. I am persuaded that such an examination will result in the honest individual concluding that these statements are not true.

Let me close by asking another question? Is it possible for people today to believe, teach and practice the same things believed, taught and practiced by the first century Christians? My answer? "Come and see."

✍️ James Hahn

### Belleville church of Christ

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[www.bellevillechurch.net](http://www.bellevillechurch.net)

#### Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study . . . . .	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship . . . . .	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship . . . . .	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study . . . . .	7:00 p.m.

#### Evangelist

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