

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

January 13

2019

CORRUPT RELIGION

As we look round about us in the world we see moral corruption on every hand. As Christians we must, by example and teaching, do all we can to turn ourselves and others from such corruption. You would think that all people who claim to believe in God and Christ would condemn practices that have contributed so greatly to the moral decay of our society. However, such is not the case.

The practices of gambling, dancing and drinking of alcoholic beverages are major contributors to and manifestations of the moral corruption and decay in our society. Not only are many religious groups not speaking out in condemnation of these practices some are even promoting them.

While in St. Louis we received a letter from a denominational church asking us to announce their "annual Homecoming." The announcement states that there will be "**GAMES, BOOTHS, BINGO, MUSIC, DANCING, BEER GARDEN...**" How can you ever expect to influence those of the world to turn from gambling, dancing and drinking of alcohol when there are churches sponsoring such activities?

Of course, these churches would still be wrong in their teaching even if they were to cease these particular practices, however you would think they would at least refrain from promoting those things

which have caused so much heart ache and misery to those who have yielded to the temptation to participate in them.

No, we will not and cannot encourage anyone to engage in these sinful activities. Paul said, "*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephesians 5:1-12). ✠ James Hahn*



BAPTISM

A Work of Merit?

No man who sins can earn his salvation--"*for the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). When the Bible speaks of meriting salvation, it speaks of living perfectly --"*for it is written, Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them*" (Galatians 3:10). The works, therefore, that are profitable for justification are unblemished "good works"--an unvariable life of doing right.

The Bible, thus, affirms-- "*for by grace have ye been saved*

through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; NOT OF WORKS, THAT NO MAN SHOULD BOAST" (Ephesians 2:8,9; see Galatians 2:16; Romans 4:1-8). That no man is justified by "works" is fundamental Bible teaching--**"for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23).

But what is equally basic is that baptism is essential to salvation. Jesus said: **"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned"** (Mark 16:15,16). Peter said: **"Repent ye, and be BAPTIZED every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ UNTO THE REMISSION OF SINS"** (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Saul of Tarsus: **"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be BAPTIZED, and WASH AWAY THY SINS, calling on his name"** (Acts 22:16).

If man is not saved by "works" of merit and "baptism" is necessary to be saved, it logically follows that baptism is not a work of merit. What, then, is baptism?

Baptism, first of all, is an expression or work of faith. Does anyone think Noah merited salvation from the flood by building an ark? The Bible says, by so doing, he was saved by faith (Hebrews 11:7). Did Israel earn for themselves the city of Jericho because they marched around the walls? The scriptures say it was by faith (Hebrews 11:30).

Examples abound of obedient faith by which men were justified before God, but none quite so obvious as Abraham--father of the Jewish nation. This venerable man of faith was saved **"apart from works"** (Romans 4:6), but is used as an illustration of justification by obedient faith. **"Ye see,"** James writes, **"that by WORKS a man is justified, and not only by faith"** (James 2:24). In the very epistle written to condemn salvation by works and commend justification by faith, the writer reveals that his apostleship and the gospel were designed to produce **"obedience of faith among all nations"** (Romans 1:5; 16:26).

Baptism, in the next place, as an expression of faith, earns nothing, but rather pleads to God for forgiveness. It is the sinners **"appeal to God for a good conscience"** (1 Peter 3:21). Saul of Tarsus' baptism, as noted earlier, was a calling on the name of the Lord that his sins might be washed away (see Acts 22:16).

Does anyone imagine for a moment that Naaman, the Syrian leper, earned his healing by dipping in the Jordan River seven times? Having been informed by a Jewish servant that the prophet in Samaria could **"recover him of his leprosy,"** Naaman went immediately to Israel. The prophet's message was: **"Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean"** (2 Kings 5:3,10). When he was persuaded to trust the prophet's words, **"he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan"** and **"his flesh came again unto him like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean"** (2 Kings 5:14). Obedient faith cleansed Naaman--not works of righteousness, merit, or perfection. His obedience was an appeal to God for recovery. He earned nothing!

So it is with baptism. How could anyone imagine that by being baptized a person deserves forgiveness and the right to go to heaven? What utter nonsense!! One could just as logically argue that "repentance" or "confession" merits salvation. All are acts of faith--appeals to God's grace for justification. ✍ L. A. Stauffer

Belleville church of Christ
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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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