

Baptist Training Course

Sponsor's Guide

For Sponsors of Adult BTC

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Our Baptist Heritage According to New Testament Doctrines

Quarterly Aim: By the conclusion of this quarter the students will discuss and trace the history of Baptist churches back to the time of Christ by New Testament doctrines.

LESSON CONTENTS

September

Bill Johnson
Editor in Chief

7—Baptist Heritage and the Founder of the Lord's Churches	2
14—Baptist Heritage and the Doctrine of Creation	6
21—Baptist Heritage and Salvation by Grace	10
28—Baptist Heritage and Blood Redemption	13

October

Wayne Sewell
Business Manager

5—Baptist Heritage and Security of the Believer	17
12—Baptist Heritage and the Perversion of Infant Baptism	21
19—Baptist Heritage and the Perversion of the Lord's Supper	26
26—Baptist Churches and Freedom of Conscience	30

November

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2—Baptist Heritage and the World System	35
9—Baptist Heritage and the Doctrine of Faithfulness	39
16—Baptist Heritage and the Word of God	44
23—Baptist Heritage and the Godhead	48
30—Baptist Heritage and the Second Coming	52

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Baptist Heritage and the Founder of the Lord's Churches

Lesson Text: Matthew 4:18-22.

Background Scripture: Matthew 16:16-18; Luke 6:12-19; 10:1-12; John 1:35-51; Ephesians 5:21-30; Colossians 1:18.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will list reasons why Jesus founded His New Testament church during His personal ministry.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Glory in the Church, Ephesians 3:21.

God's plan from the beginning included New Testament churches. Acts 15:18 states, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Israel's failure to be a witnessing nation before the world and its rejection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, did not catch God by surprise. His plan for New Testament churches was hidden from the Jews. Ephesians 3:9 states, "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ." The mystery hidden in God from the beginning refers to the institution of the New Testament church.

God planned to receive glory from New Testament churches. A New Testament church is a local, visible body of scripturally baptized believers who are covenanted together by the Holy Spirit to carry out the Great Commission according to New Testament principles. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus did build His church during His personal ministry.

A New Testament church may give glory to God for several reasons. A true church is founded on the only proper foundation, Jesus Christ. (See Ephesians 2:20). A true church is paid for in full by the precious blood of Christ. Acts 20:28 states, "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." A true church has the authority of Jesus Christ to preach the gospel, to baptize believers, to teach all the things Jesus commanded and to fulfill the marching orders of the Great Commission. A New Testament church is "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). A true church is a "holy temple in the Lord" and a "habitation of God through the Spirit." (See Ephesians 2:21, 22.) A New Testament church is unlike any other religious organization. Only a New Testament church gives glory to God.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Matthew 4:18-22. The word *church* is *ecclesia* in the original language. It comes from *ek* meaning "out of" and *kle-sis* from *kaleo* meaning "a calling out or to call." The word *church* denotes a local, visible gathering for a specific pur-

pose. The word *church*, therefore, refers to the authorized assembly or congregation of saved and scripturally baptized people that God has gathered together. A New Testament church has God's authority to carry out the Great Commission. (See Matthew 28:19, 20.) When Jesus spoke to the church He called out, trained, taught, authorized and commissioned, He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

The origin of the church, according to the meaning of the word, must be traced back to the first ones Jesus called out. The Lesson Text describes Jesus calling out His first church members. Jesus had been publicly identified as the Son in whom the Father was well pleased at His baptism by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13-17). Jesus endured forty days of temptation and proved Himself sinless (Matt. 4:1-11). Early in Jesus' public ministry, He began to call out saved, scripturally baptized believers to be a part of His church. Jesus made a specific call to four men to become a part of His church. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to be fishers of men. They were the first four apostles and the first four church members. He named at least eight other apostles while He was here on the earth. First Corinthians 12:28 states, "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles." The origin of the church precedes those apostles Jesus personally selected and placed in His church.

The Bible gives the list of the original twelve apostles who were the charter members of the church (Matt. 10:2-4). After calling them out, Jesus sent them forth to work the limited commission. Matthew 10:5, 6 states, "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The limited commission was the first organized effort of the church to go forth preaching

the gospel by Jesus' command and authority.

Jesus invited His first four church members to follow Him. *Follow* means "to come now, at this point in time." The church Jesus built gathered around the One who called them. This constituted a local, visible assembly. *Follow* denotes both time and place. The church consisted of a local, visible assembly gathered at a particular time in the place where Jesus was. The church followed Him and recognized Him as its head. Ephesians 1:22 states that God the Father "put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church." Several biblical references emphatically state Jesus is the head of His churches (Eph. 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). Every New Testament church has the responsibility to follow Jesus by meeting at a designated time and place and going forth to spread the gospel.

Jesus informed His church that "I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). The members were to repeatedly and habitually proclaim the gospel to others. People learn how to fish by fishing. Church members learn how to become "fishers of men" by sharing the gospel.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:16-18. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). After Peter correctly identified Jesus as the Christ, Jesus referred to Himself as the Rock upon whom He would build His church. This definite statement forbids recognition of any other religious organization as scriptural because only New Testament churches are built on Christ, the Rock of Ages. All other religious organizations were established by man. Jesus promised church perpetuity. Church perpetuity means that a succession of New Testament churches will continue to exist on the earth from the

church Jesus built until He comes at the rapture. Jesus said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). *Prevail against* means "to overpower." All of Satan's power cannot cause New Testament churches to cease to exist on the earth.

Luke 6:12-19. Jesus prayed all night before selecting the twelve apostles who would be the leaders of His church. There can be no apostolic succession since Jesus "named" them. No man nor church has the right to designate anyone as an apostle. Later, Paul was an apostle by the will of God (Eph. 1:1). The word *apostle* means "one sent forth on a mission." Jesus set apostles in His church (1 Cor. 12:28). The church was a local, visible assembly in which Jesus met "with them" (Luke 6:17). Great crowds gathered "to hear him" (verse 17).

Luke 10:1-12. Jesus expected every church member to be a fisher of men. He sent out the twelve apostles as well as "other seventy also." Jesus taught these seventy to pray for more laborers. Jesus sent them forth on the limited commission with specific instructions how to deport themselves, how to accept the hospitality that was offered and how to respond to rejection. Their work in sharing the gospel was a great priority to begin without delay. They were not to take time to pack for a journey. Their message was that the kingdom of God is at hand. They preached the gospel with an urgency that gave men the opportunity to make a decision.

John 1:35-51. After John the Baptist identified Jesus as the Lamb of God, his disciples began to follow Jesus. This account preceded the calling out of disciples in the gospel of Matthew. (See Matthew 4:12-22.) John's account stated some saved, scripturally baptized ones followed Christ before John the Baptist was imprisoned. When they began to follow Jesus, He called them to "come and see" (John 1:39). These disciples fol-

lowed Him and "abode with Him" (verse 39). Before Andrew followed Jesus, he went after Peter and "brought him to Jesus" (verse 42). Jesus invited Philip to come. Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. After John the Baptist's disciples began to follow Jesus and after John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus called out His church from among those saved, scripturally baptized ones.

Ephesians 5:21-30. Paul compared the husband as head of the family to Christ's being the head of the institution of the New Testament church. Each church is subject to the doctrines, commands and practices Jesus taught in every thing. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. When Jesus died on the cross, the church was already in existence. Luke wrote concerning the church, "which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Faithful New Testament church members are sanctified by the Word of God so that they may be presented unto the Lord as "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). The Lord Jesus cherishes New Testament churches. Each church constitutes a visible body of Christ with various members whose only head is Jesus.

Colossians 1:18. Paul spoke of "he," Jesus, as the head of each New Testament church. Because the word *churches* occurs thirty-seven times in the New Testament, one may correctly conclude that true churches are always local, visible assemblies. Jesus is the beginning of the church. *Beginning* means "the commencement or the origin." The truth about the origin of the New Testament church demands its origin be during Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus is to be pre-eminent in each New Testament church. *Preeminence* means "first in time, place, rank, importance or influence."

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The term *the church* has become many things to many people. Some speak of *the church* with reference to all who claim to be believers in Christ all over the world. This is commonly referred to as the universal church. The Bible knows nothing of a universal, invisible church. The word *church* in the original language carries the specific meaning of a local, visible assembly. Protestants invented the universal church heresy to oppose the universal, visible religion of Rome. This false teaching permits any person or group the right to do anything in the name of religion with the facade of respectability. Many religious organizations have respectability to the world but have no authority from God. The only churches God recognizes are those after the New Testament pattern.

There are some landmarks by which New Testament churches may be recognized. (1) A true church has Christ as its only head and lawgiver and operates by executing Christ's commands. Therefore, a true church is unchanging because its head does not change. (2) Its origin may be traced back to Jesus Christ and the apostles. (3) A true church follows the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice. The principles of morality, the qualifications for preachers and deacons and sound doctrine have not changed. (4) Its nature is a local, visible body. There are many New Testament references to churches. (5) Its government is democratic. (6) It has a saved membership. (7) It has only two church ordinances. They are baptism and the Lord's Supper. (8) It has only two ordained officers. They are pastor and deacon. (9) Its work is specified in the

Great Commission. (10) It is supported by the tithes and offerings of the membership. (11) It is sovereign in all matters. A true church is not the servant of any association, convention or board. (12) It practices the separation of church and state. A true church has not received and does not receive financial support from the government. (13) It practices nonfellowship with false religions.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Those who desire to give glory to God will seek to join a New Testament church. The qualifications for church membership are a profession of faith and then scriptural baptism. In every city there are many houses of worship with many conflicting beliefs, all claiming to be the church Jesus built. A New Testament church stands alone, markedly different from the religions of men. True churches that continue to live by the landmarks that prove them to be New Testament churches give glory to God by being loyal to the doctrines, commands and practices found in the Bible.

True worship gives God the glory He deserves. True worship may only be found in a true church. The religious organizations of man cannot give God glory. Every house of worship that bears the word *church* on its sign is not necessarily a New Testament church. Church members of true churches should make a study of the landmarks of a New Testament church and make a commitment to stand for them. (See previous section.) May the Bible landmarks of truth that identified the Lord's churches in every century from the earthly ministry of Christ continue to shine like a beacon until Jesus comes.

Baptist Heritage and the Doctrine of Creation

Lesson Text: Genesis 1:1-3.

Background Scripture: Genesis 5:1, 2; Isaiah 42:5; 45:8, 12-18; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:10, 11.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will give scriptural proof that God is the Creator of the universe.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

By Word of His Power, Hebrews 1:3.

Creation must be accepted by faith. The Bible teaches “the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). *Faith* is the belief or persuasion in the truthfulness of God. The Bible is God’s inspired and inerrant Word. The Bible record declares God is the original cause of creation. *Worlds* refers to ages, specifically to the special occasion that marks the beginning of an age. This special occasion was the word of God’s power that brought the creation into existence. *Framed* means “completed, fresh, to make perfect.” When God spoke His creation into existence, it sprang forth suddenly into a visible, perfect creation.

Creation occurred by the word of His power. The Bible teaches creation is an act, not a process. *The word* indicates a single command. God did not create in stages. Creation sprang into existence as the perfect act of a perfect God. Concerning the creation, Isaiah’s prophecy states, “I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I

did them suddenly, and they came to pass” (Isa. 48:3). *Suddenly* means “instantly.” Some believe in an evolutionary process by which the creation evolved into the present order. Others believe in theistic evolution, the idea that God started things moving in creation and then let the creation evolve into the present order. It takes more faith to believe in evolution than it does to believe in an all-powerful God who spoke His creation into existence.

Faith in God who spoke creation into existence agrees with the truth that the same God with the same almighty power can transform an unsaved person into a child of God instantly. Second Corinthians 5:17 states, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Genesis 1:1-3. The Bible declares God’s creation was a completed act. *Created* refers to a specific time in the past. This time is designated “in the beginning.” *In the beginning* means “the first in time, place or order.” *The heaven* refers to the sky where the clouds are and

to the expanse where the stars are. *The earth* refers to the ground, the world. God's perfect creation existed in its completed form in Genesis 1:1. The Baptist heritage accepts without reservation the truth that God created all things according to the Genesis account of creation.

The creation became marred and uninhabitable. *Was* means "to become or to come to pass." *Without form* means "to become waste, to be worthless or a desolation." *Void* means "an indistinguishable ruin." *Darkness* means "misery, destruction, death, sorrow, wickedness." The language indicates to make dark, to blacken, to become black or to cause to be darkness. *The deep* refers to a commotion, a disturbance, a destruction, an agitation, a breaking or a crushing that produced an abyss. The Holy Spirit brooded over the marred creation. *Moved* means "brooded, fluttered or moved." *The waters* means "a wasting, a watering or gushing forth of flood waters." God's perfect, habitable creation became neither.

Does the Bible teach God's perfect creation originally existed as destruction, chaos or a wasteland? Clearly, Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 speak of two different states of existence. First, God spoke an unmarred creation into existence. Second, God's creation became a chaotic, uninhabitable wasteland. The Bible reveals sin produces chaos and destruction. God's original, perfect creation suffered total devastation as a result of one act of sin. Angels were the only created beings in existence at the time of God's creation. Job 38:4-7 states, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang

together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" When God spoke to Job about the act of creation, He revealed the celebration of the angels. At the creation, the "morning stars" or "sons" of God shouted joyful praises to God. These "morning stars" or "sons" were angels. God's angels witnessed and rejoiced to see God's perfect creation. If God's creation had been anything less than perfect, there would have been no reason for the angels to celebrate.

An angel's rebellion resulted in God's judgment upon sin. Jesus said, "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18; Ezek. 28:14-18). When God created the angels, He created perfect beings. When Lucifer chose to sin, he mounted a violent rebellion against God. God defeated Lucifer, cast him down to earth and destruction resulted (Isa. 14:12-20). Isaiah 14:16, 17 states, "They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?" When Satan was cast down, the catastrophic event included the earth's trembling violently and becoming a chaotic, uninhabitable wasteland.

God's first act of reconstructing the chaos of the universe was to restore the light that had become hidden in the devastation. At God's command, light shone forth. The process began of returning His creation to inhabitable orderliness.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Genesis 5:1, 2. After God had completed the process of reconstructing the chaos as a habitable environment, He created mankind. The reconstruction process continued throughout six twenty-four hour days. On the sixth day, God

gave life to the man, Adam, created in the “likeness” or image of God. The Godhead is the Trinity—one God existing in a unity yet with three distinct persons. Mankind is a triune being with body, mind and spirit. *Likeness* means “resemblance or in like manner as another.”

Isaiah 42:5. Isaiah describes the act of creation as a sudden event. *Stretched out* means “stretched forth” in the same manner as a shower curtain can be stretched out suddenly. God’s perfect creation sprang into existence. *Spread forth* means “to spread over.” God spread forth His creation over an expanse where there had been emptiness. *The heavens* is dual in this reference. Hebrew language has single, dual and plural for three or more. This reference expresses dual heavens; the physical heavens where birds fly and the stars are; and the place where God lives.

Isaiah 45:8, 12-18. Isaiah declared God is the Creator. God intended His perfect creation to be a habitation where His creatures could rejoice with Him in perfect righteousness and perfect salvation. God made the earth habitable and placed man upon it as His crowning act. God “stretched out the heavens” by His powerful command. Isaiah 48:13 states, “Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.” God provided the earth as a habitation for mankind.

John 1:1-3. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The term *Word was God* specifically refers to Jesus as the Christ. Before God’s original creation, God existed as the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. They have always existed and will always exist. *With God* means “by His side.” The Godhead works as one. Jesus had His role in creation in perfect harmony with the role of God the

Father and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father designed the creation. God the Holy Spirit superintended the creation. God the Son made everything by the word of His power.

Colossians 1:16. Jesus Christ created all things. *All things* includes heavenly and earthly things, visible and invisible things and every rule or dominion. Jesus Christ pressed forth the invisible elements into a visible creation by the word of His power. Jesus Christ also created angels and realms of authority that are not visible in this world. *Thrones* refers to the powers of rulers. *Dominions* means “the supreme authority of a government.” *Principalities* refers to the rank of authority of the angels. *Powers* means “God gave angels superhuman strength.” God’s power far exceeds the superhuman power of the angels.

Revelation 4:10, 11. Jesus Christ is worthy of worship by every part of His creation. The twenty-four elders represent Old Testament saints and New Testament saints gathered to worship Jesus. *Twelve* represents the tribes of Israel and the apostles (Rev. 21:12, 14). Old Testament worship led by the Levitical priesthood was organized into twenty-four courses. The number *twelve* is one of the perfect numbers, representing government or ordinal perfection. In Heaven where God’s throne is, Jesus Christ receives honor and worship as the Creator of all things. God’s Word reveals that the purpose of the creation is “for thy pleasure.”

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Human philosophy represents man as being basically good and capable of becoming a god. When men attempt to consider the age-old questions—Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?—his philosophy of life must be examined. Evolutionists, humanists and atheists deny the biblical doctrine of

the creation. The origin of the human race and of all things must be traced back to an all-powerful Creator. A creation of necessity implies a creator. The order, complexity and harmony of God's perfect creation leave no room to doubt that Jesus Christ is the Creator.

God wants every person to be aware that He is the Creator of all things. Without God, no living thing could exist. Paul said, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). The visible creation gives witness to the existence of Almighty God. Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." With the witness of God, every person of normal intelligence is accountable to God. Some prefer not to think about God. Romans 1:20, 21 states, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Whether one considers God or not, the day will come when each person will stand before God in judgment (Heb. 9:27).

The Baptist heritage holds the position that God created all things. Jesus, the Creator of all things, is the only Savior. Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Of Jehovah, it is said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45:22). Of Jesus, it is said, "Neither is there salvation in any other:

for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Without the power of Jesus Christ the Creator, nothing would exist. Without the power of Jesus Christ the Creator, no one can be saved.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Some accept the idea of the chaos origin of creation. This is not a new idea. In J. Louis Guthrie's book *Christ in Creation*, page 7, he wrote, "Philosophers were trying to inject into Judaism and Christianity the chaos origin for both gods and men. This is the philosophy of the Greek and Latin writers, and the materialism of the ages surrounding late Jewish life and early Christianity." When God's people attempt to defend the Bible against the evolutionist, the philosopher, the secular humanist and the atheist, they need not coin new terms or new doctrines such as the chaos origin of creation. When one takes into account all the Scriptures used in this lesson, he will find ample biblical evidence that a perfect God only does perfect things. God's original creation was perfect.

Baptists who continue to accept the Genesis account of creation stand by the Baptist heritage of biblical truth. God's people need to search the Scriptures and accept by faith the things taught in the Bible. Romans 10:17 states, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The biblical doctrine of the Genesis account of creation must be accepted by faith. Hebrews 11:3 states, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

Baptist Heritage and Salvation by Grace

Lesson Text: Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Background Scripture: Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1, 2; Philippians 1:7; Colossians 1:13, 14; Titus 2:11; 3:7; Hebrews 2:9.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Not by Works, Titus 3:5, 6.

Salvation is not by works of men. Some believe Satan's lie that God will not condemn anyone to hell. They believe if their good works outweigh their bad works, God will take them to Heaven. Jesus said, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). These people gamble their eternal destiny on the devil's lie. Romans 3:10-12 states, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." No person is good enough to be saved by his own works.

Salvation is by God's power. John 1:12, 13 states, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

God's power unto salvation is extended to the repentant sinner who responds to God's conviction by believing and by asking God to save him. Acts 16:30, 31 states, "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The Philippian jailer thought he could be saved by doing good works but was told God's salvation is for those that believe in Jesus.

God's salvation is only available in Christ. God made provision for the salvation of mankind by the shed blood and sacrificial death of Jesus who rose from the dead. Concerning salvation, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Ephesians 2:8, 9. God's salvation is His gift to any person who will come to Him on His terms. God's terms for salvation are repentance, faith and asking. Men may say, I am a sinner, without true repentance. Repentance is the awareness of one's sinful condition before God, turning away from sin and turning to

God. Holy Spirit conviction draws the repentant sinner to believe and ask for God's salvation. John the Baptist preached the necessity of repentance for salvation. Matthew 3:1, 2 states, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus Christ preached the necessity of repentance for salvation. Matthew 4:17 states, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Those who do not repent will not receive God's salvation. Luke 13:3 states, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Those who repent may believe on Jesus Christ and receive God's salvation when they ask for it.

God offers salvation by His grace. Grace is the unearned favor of God. Grace denies any merit on the part of mankind to deserve salvation. God's grace rests on the solid foundation of the acceptable sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice for sin purchased salvation by the blood of Jesus. First Peter 1:18, 19 states, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." God's grace requires a sinner to believe in what Jesus Christ has already done to pay man's sin debt in full. The grace of God places the repentant, believing sinner into Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of the grace of God sufficient to meet the needs of every sinner.

God offers salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is simply trust in God. No sinner is saved by trusting in water. No sinner is saved by trusting in his own good works. Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Romans 3:22, 23 states, "Even the righteousness of God which is

by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Salvation is a gift. It cannot be earned. *Gift* means "a present, a sacrifice or an offering." Jesus Christ made the sacrifice for sins so that salvation could be offered to all humanity as a present. God did not spare any expense to offer mankind salvation as a gift. Romans 8:32 states, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Jesus Christ offered Himself as payment in full to give salvation to repentant, believing sinners. Second Corinthians 9:15 states, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Whosoever will may receive God's gift of salvation (Rom. 10:13).

Salvation is not by works of men. No man may boast of procuring his own salvation. Those who receive God's salvation must give all the glory to Him.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Acts 4:12. Jesus is the only Savior. No other person can provide salvation. A belief in Allah, Confucius, Buddha or any other will not result in salvation. Although some men believe they may come to God in many different ways, the Bible affirms there is but one way to come to God for salvation. That one way is Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1, 2. Salvation is being found justified by faith in the sight of God. God's plan of salvation allows Him to be just in condemning all as sinners and to be the justifier of all sinners who come to Him by repentance, faith and asking through Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:7. Salvation is an act of God that changes the heart of a sinner. Philippians 1:6 states, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it

until the day of Jesus Christ." All who are saved by grace through faith are in Christ forever.

Colossians 1:13, 14. God's salvation includes a deliverance from the penalty and condemnation of sin. The penalty of sin is eternal separation from God in hell. The condemnation of sin is the condition of one's being found guilty before God. God removes the guilt of one's sins, covers his sins with the blood of Jesus and forgives his sins. The saved sinner has citizenship in Heaven.

Titus 2:11. God gives to every person the knowledge that man is a sinner and the conviction to feel the need to turn to God for salvation. When a person understands he needs to be saved, he chooses Heaven or hell by accepting or rejecting God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

Titus 3:7. The saved person is "justified" by grace. *Justified* means "to have right standing before God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ." The saved person becomes an heir of all the riches of Jesus Christ. The hope of eternal life is a confident expectation based on the power of God to keep him saved.

Hebrews 2:9. Jesus suffered death so that every person may be offered God's salvation. When Jesus went to the cross, He shed His blood and gave His life to pay the sin debt for all. First Timothy 2:6 states, "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

People need the truth about God's salvation. Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). Religious people who tell many different plans of salvation give people false hope concerning their salvation. The scribes and Pharisees

were unbelievers. The word *hypocrite* means "one who pretends to be something, one who plays a part." They pretended to know Jesus. Every person who trusts in any plan other than God's plan will reside eternally in hell. Like the Pharisees and scribes, many people of today trust in a plan of salvation by works.

God's plan of salvation is by His grace, plus nothing. Romans 11:6 states, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God wants all people to be saved. Second Peter 3:9 states, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." *Perish* means "to destroy, to die, to lose." Unbelievers face eternal destruction in hell. Unbelievers will experience the second death, which may be defined as eternal separation from God. Unbelievers will lose the greatest opportunity they will ever have by refusing to repent, believe and ask God for His salvation.

God extends His grace to all that will come to Him in faith. First Timothy 2:4 states, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." It is God's plan for every saved person to follow the Lord in scriptural baptism. It is God's plan for every church member to be a soul-winner. Every church member has the responsibility of the Great Commission. Mark 16:15 states, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Church members need to get going with the gospel of Christ.

Baptist Heritage and Blood Redemption

Lesson Text: Revelation 1:5; 5:9.

Background Scripture: Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:12, 14, 22; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain that blood redemption is an essential doctrine of New Testament churches.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The Blood of the New Testament,
Matthew 26:28.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a church ordinance for a memorial of His death. When Jesus went to the cross, He shed His blood to make salvation available for the human race. The shedding of Jesus' blood fulfilled the requirements of the Law. Jesus' blood and His death were the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The Old Testament or Old Covenant traces the line of the blood. This is referred to as the scarlet thread of the Bible. It begins with the innocent animals that were slain to provide a covering for Adam and Eve. It includes the bloody sacrifice Abel offered that was acceptable to God. It also includes all the subsequent animal sacrifices that shed blood pointing to Jesus the Lamb of God who would shed His own blood.

Jesus ratified a New Testament or a New Covenant by the shedding of His blood. Colossians 2:14 states, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." The new covenant had a better blood than the old. Jesus took upon

Himself a fleshly body and blood. Hebrews 2:14 states, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Jesus' blood once for all did what the repetition of the animal sacrifices could not do. Hebrews 9:18, 19 states, "Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats." Jesus' blood paid for redemption. Hebrews 13:12 states, "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." God's plan of blood redemption through the shed blood of Jesus Christ is the only way sinful man can stand justified before a holy, righteous God.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Revelation 1:5. Jesus Christ is the faithful witness. *Faithful* means "trustworthy or true." Jesus said of Himself, "I am . . . the truth" (John 14:6). The word *witness* comes from the word that looks like the English word *martyr*. It means

“the record.” The judicial record is based on the validity of the witnesses that testify. God’s record is trustworthy based on the absolute righteousness and truthfulness of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was the first to be resurrected from the dead. Others were brought back to life only to die at a later time. Jesus was the first to experience the resurrection never to die again. (See 1 Corinthians 15:20, 21.) Jesus shed all His blood to offer salvation to all. First Corinthians 15:22 states, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” Jesus’ resurrection gives proof of the reality of God’s offer of eternal life.

Jesus is the prince over all the kings of the earth. *Prince* means “first in rank, greatest in power and chief over all.” Jesus Christ rules over all the kings of the earth. Jesus is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16). Paul said, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. 2:9, 10). It is this same King Jesus who loved sinful humanity enough to offer Himself as a substitute for every sinner.

Jesus loved sinners enough to cleanse them by His own blood. The shedding of Jesus’ blood and His death on Calvary stand as the greatest exhibition of love the world has ever seen. (See John 3:16.) There is no love like His. Jesus knew water could not wash away the stains of sin. Jesus shed His blood to wash sinners clean. Every saved person can say that Jesus “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5).

Revelation 5:9. There will be a new song of praise to Jesus the Lamb in Heaven. Revelation 4 and 5 take place in Heaven. Revelation chapter 5 describes

the throne room in Heaven. God the Father holds a book with seven seals in His right hand as He sits on the throne. Jesus the Lamb of God stands to receive the book from God the Father. The Holy Spirit’s presence is represented by the seven spirits of God (Isa. 11:2). The twenty-four elders will sing of redemption by the blood of Jesus.

Blood redemption requires a kinsman-redeemer. Jesus is the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:6). Jesus came in the flesh through the virgin birth. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and she conceived. The baby she bore received the name Jesus. Contrary to other births, the birth of Jesus was not a new life begun at conception. He was the sinless sacrifice God required to pay in full the sin debt of all mankind. Jesus is the eternal God who willingly accepted the role in salvation that God the Father planned from the beginning (Rev. 13:8). Jesus came in the flesh to be our Kinsman-Redeemer. The role of the kinsman-redeemer is explained thoroughly in the book of Ruth. Boaz acted the part of a kinsman to redeem all that belonged to Ruth’s dead husband. Boaz purchased the rights of inheritance. Jesus came and purchased salvation by His own precious blood as the Kinsman-Redeemer according to the flesh (1 Peter 1:18, 19). The redemption God demanded required a substitutionary death and the shedding of blood, hence blood redemption.

Blood redemption is good for people of “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Jesus fulfills the role of the Kinsman-Redeemer for all humanity. *Redeem* means “to purchase, to buy, to go to market.” Jesus went to the cross to pay redemption’s price of His shed blood and His death to offer salvation to all people of the world. Adam’s sin sold the human race into slavery to sin (Rom. 5:12, 17-19). Jesus’ sacrificial death and shedding of His

blood bought the rights to redeem any sinner out of the slave market of sin.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Acts 20:28. Jesus purchased the church of God with His own blood. The Baptist heritage traces through New Testament churches that demand a redeemed church membership. Jesus purchased His blood-bought church. He also purchased salvation by His blood. *Purchased* refers to an acquisition, a completed transaction.

Ephesians 1:7. Blood redemption is by the riches of God's grace. Holy angels do not have physical bodies; therefore, they have no blood to offer, even though they are pure. All men are sinners, so they could only die for their own sins. God sent His own Son, Jesus, to accomplish the work of the Kinsman-Redeemer (Phil. 2:6-9). Blood redemption is the only way to receive the forgiveness of sins.

Ephesians 2:13. Blood redemption accomplished several things. Salvation became possible for repentant, believing sinners. Blood redemption broke down the wall that sin built between sinful humanity and the holy, righteous God (Eph. 2:14). Blood redemption makes it possible for the redeemed to stand accepted in the presence of God (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). Blood redemption removes God's condemnation from the saved sinner. Blood redemption gives the saved sinner peace with God. Blood redemption satisfies God's requirements and the sinner's every need.

Colossians 1:20. Jesus made peace by the blood of His cross. Peace with God demands reconciliation by the blood of Jesus. *Reconcile* means "to come into agreement." Saved sinners agree with God concerning their sinful condition. Jesus' death purchased blood

redemption for all creation (Rom. 8:22-24).

Hebrews 9:12, 14, 22. Jesus' blood has been applied in the Holy Place in the sanctuary in Heaven. The earthly Tabernacle was sanctified by animal blood. Jesus' blood provided eternal redemption. *Eternal* means "perpetual, everlasting, forever." Blood redemption makes provision for the sins after salvation so the saved sinner's conscience can be made clean for acceptable service to God. God requires blood redemption for forgiveness of sins.

1 Peter 1:19. The price could not be met by gold or silver. God demanded a payment in blood, pure blood, righteous blood. Jesus the Lamb of God was "without blemish and without spot" in God's sight. (See also John 1:29.) Blood redemption became a finalized transaction by the payment of the precious blood of Jesus Christ. *Precious* means "valuable, costly, honored, esteemed or beloved."

1 John 1:7. Blood redemption gives saved sinners both a relationship with God and fellowship with God. All children of God who are in fellowship with God should be in fellowship with one another as God's redeemed people. After salvation, the only way saved sinners can continue to be in fellowship with God is by the forgiveness of sins. Sin destroys fellowship with God, not relationship. (See 1 John 1:9.)

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

In one sense, blood redemption is a loosing or a setting free from the penalty and guilt of sin. Blood redemption is made possible by the atonement of Jesus Christ. As the One who paid the price for redemption, Jesus is worthy and deserves to be called the Redeemer.

Jesus' redemption frees men from the dominion or dominating power of sin.

God's redeemed people have a new nature. Romans 6:11-13 states, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." God's redeemed people have a new way to live. The new nature of the child of God has the indwelling Spirit who imparts the power to lead a holy life.

Although blood redemption is freely offered to all people, it is only effective for those who respond to God's conviction with repentance, faith and asking for salvation. Blood redemption is a universal opportunity offered by the grace of God to meet mankind's greatest need.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Slaves were redeemed from the slave market for a price. In New Testament days, the average price for a slave was

thirty pieces of silver. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for the meager price of a slave. Jesus went to the cross to purchase redemption with His blood so that sinners could be set free from a life controlled by the old sin nature. To those who realize they are in the bondage of sin, God's gracious offer should be extremely attractive. Whatever one's struggle with the bondage of sin may be, Jesus is the answer.

Blood redemption speaks of a ransom, a rescue and a redeemer. Jesus gave Himself to be the ransom for the world. First Timothy 2:5, 6 states, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." Jesus came to the rescue of a world filled with sinners. The Bible word for *rescue* is *delivered*. Romans 8:21 states, "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Blood redemption offers a rescue out of sin's bondage and a deliverance into the liberty of a life whereby one may freely choose to serve Christ. Jesus the Redeemer lives eternally to rescue seeking sinners (Job 19:25; Isa. 41:14).

Baptist Heritage and Security of the Believer

Lesson Text: Romans 8:35-39.

Background Scripture: John 6:37-39, 51-58; 10:28, 29; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 10:14.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss reasons why security of the believer is an essential doctrine to our Baptist heritage.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Able To Keep, 2 Timothy 1:12.

Paul knew he was saved. His personal experience of salvation occurred on the road to Damascus. He said, "I know whom I have believed." He knew the time and place when he felt God's conviction, repented of his sinful condition, trusted in Jesus Christ and asked God to save him. The Ethiopian eunuch was saved in his chariot on the road after he left Jerusalem. Zacchaeus was saved in Jericho after he came down from the sycamore tree. The woman of Samaria was saved by the well. God's salvation is a know-so experience when the seeking sinner turns to God and relies on His promise. God's promise is still "for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). God promised to keep every person saved who is born again. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." *Everlasting life* is life without end. Paul and every child of God have God's promise of eternal security.

Paul was convinced of the power of God to keep every child of God forever. He said he was "persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him." *Persuaded* means "convinced by evidence, by authority or by inward certainty." The inward certainty of salvation is by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:16 states, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The evidence of God's ability to keep His children forever rests on the biblical truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Able* means "mighty, more than powerful enough." *Keep* means "preserve, guard, save." Paul had the same kind of know-so salvation that the apostle John had. First John 3:2 states, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Paul knew the day would come when he would see Jesus.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Romans 8:35-39. Paul assured the members of the church at Rome of the security of the believer. He listed seven

categories of things in life that could not cause a child of God to lose his salvation. He listed ten other things in the spiritual realm that could not cause a child of God to lose his salvation. Salvation is secure because it places one "in Christ Jesus our Lord" (verse 39). Once a person has been born into the family of God, he is in Christ forever. No child of God can ever become unborn.

Nothing in life can destroy the security of the believer. *Tribulation* means "pressure, affliction or trouble." *Distress* means "anguish or calamity." *Persecution* means "to be pursued in order to cause bodily harm." *Famine* means "hunger or to suffer deprivation." *Nakedness* means "nudity." *Peril* means "danger." The *sword* means "a knife, war or judicial punishment." If any of these seven categories of things caused a believer to lose his life, then "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (verse 37). Paul assured the members of the church at Corinth that he was ready to die so he could go to be with the Lord. Second Corinthians 5:8 states, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." Children of God do not have to fear any problem in life or anything that would bring about their death. Death for a child of God is simply a means of entrance into the presence of God.

Children of God are "more than conquerors" in Christ. Jesus secured the victory. First Corinthians 15:3, 4 states, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." At Calvary, Jesus overcame every enemy. At His resurrection Jesus held the keys of death. Revelation 1:18 states, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." *More than con-*

querors means "a decisive victory, an uncontested result or to totally subdue the enemy." Jesus' victory over death, hell and Satan assures the child of God that he is secure in Christ.

Paul was totally convinced none of the ten things in the spiritual realm could separate a child of God from his security in Christ. Death is separation from God. Death cannot separate a child of God from Jesus. *Life* means "anything in one's time on earth." Nothing one does in life can forfeit his salvation. Angels are created beings that serve God in heavenly places or as unseen servants of God in the world (Heb. 1:14). No angel has the power to cause a child of God to lose his salvation. Satan is an angel. Satan cannot destroy a child of God's security in Christ. *Principalities* means "rank." The angels serve with different ranks of authority. No angel could have such high-ranking authority to cause a child of God to lose his salvation. *Power* means "might." The angels have strength beyond that of men. The strength of angels cannot sever the tie that binds a child of God to Jesus. *Things present* refers to anything at hand. Any issue or circumstance that threatens a child of God cannot touch his security in Christ. *Things to come* refers to things after this life. The child of God is as secure in Christ in eternity as he is in this life. *Height* means "a barrier or an elevated place." No wall could be built high enough to keep a child of God from entering God's presence when he dies. *Depth* means "a mystery, something not understood." There is no mystery about the security of the believer. It is as simple as God's promise in John 3:16. *Any other creature* means "thing, creation or ordinance." Nothing exists that can deprive a child of God of his salvation. A child of God cannot sin away his salvation and the devil cannot take it away.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

John 6:37-39, 51-58. Jesus promised never to cast away any child of God. All who are saved will be with God in the eternal ages to come. Jesus explained salvation as eternal life. The child of God is secure because Christ dwells in him. The child of God's eternal life is secure in Christ. Jesus said, "He shall live by me" (John 6:57). Salvation results in a child of God living forever with the Lord (Psalm 23:6).

John 10:28, 29. Salvation is eternal life by the gift of God. Saved ones will never perish. No person could remove a child of God from his security in Christ. *Pluck* means "to seize by force." Children of God are held securely in Christ's grasp. If Christ's power is not sufficient to assure a saved one of his salvation, Jesus asserted the truth that God the Father also preserves the security of the child of God. There is no power, no ability and no might sufficient to prevail against God.

Ephesians 4:30. The Holy Spirit seals a child of God. This sealing is a securing of the individual believer until he comes into the presence of Christ. Romans 8:14 states, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Holy Spirit will lead the believer to Jesus. Jesus promised, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (John 14:3, 4). The child of God knows the way to Jesus because the Holy Spirit seals, secures and guides him (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Hebrews 7:25. Jesus is mighty to save. *Able* refers to the almighty power of God. God's power makes eternal security a certainty for every child of God. *Uttermost* means "to the end, the entirety or to completion." Jesus saves forever or all the way to Heaven. Jesus

lives to keep children of God saved. His resurrection gives the child of God a living hope. Children of God are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

Hebrews 10:14. By His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus paid the full cost for every child of God's eternal salvation. *He hath perfected* means "Jesus accomplished, finished and completed the work of salvation." There is nothing anyone can do to help save himself or to help himself stay saved. Jesus did it all. Salvation is security forever for those who are in Christ. *Sanctified* means "made holy or made pure or to set apart." When the child of God is saved, he receives the righteousness of Christ that makes him acceptable to God.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Some mistakenly believe salvation is not secure unless one seals it by baptism or the Lord's Supper. Those who believe in the effectiveness of the ordinances to secure the child of God call them sacraments. The emphasis on outward religious ritual began at the close of the second century. J. M. Carroll, in *The Trail of Blood*, page 16, wrote, "The Jews as well as the Pagans, had for many generations, been trained to lay great stress on Ceremonials. They had come to look upon types as anti-types, shadows as real substances, and ceremonies as real saving agencies. How easy to come thus to look upon baptism. They reasoned thus: The Bible has much to say concerning baptism. Much stress is laid upon the ordinance and one's duty concerning it. Surely it must have something to do with one's salvation." The same reasoning was later applied to the Lord's Supper.

Baptists have ever held to the doctrine that salvation is secure by the finished work of Jesus Christ. Baptist fore-

fathers practiced nonfellowship with congregations that adopted this error of the sacraments. The Baptist heritage reveals a distinctive difference between those true churches that held to the doctrine of the security of the believer by the finished work of Christ and those congregations of Catholics and later the Protestants that believed the work of Christ had to be secured by the sacraments.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Changes in doctrines such as the security of the believer come about slowly over long periods of time. True Baptists must stand firm on the doctrine of the security of the believer by refusing to accept or teach anything less than the finished work of Jesus Christ to secure salvation for the believer. At first, change seems so small and harmless that

it appears unimportant. Any change in teaching or practice should be vigorously opposed. Jude 3 states, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." This generation of Baptists must contend for the faith to teach it thoroughly to the next.

The Baptist heritage should be noted as one that demanded a redeemed church membership. True Baptists have never settled for members who trusted in water or the elements of the Lord's Supper to complete or to secure their salvation. These saved ones were received into New Testament churches after they shared their profession of faith. Churches that receive members without hearing their profession of faith will not long have a redeemed membership.

H v y u l c



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Baptist Heritage and the Perversion of Infant Baptism

Lesson Text: Matthew 28:19, 20.

Background Scripture: Matthew 3:7, 8, 13-17; John 3:22, 23; Acts 2:38-41; 8:36-38; 10:47, 48; 16:15, 33.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss the fact that true Baptists have never been proponents of baptizing infants or any other perversion of baptism.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Only Saved Ones, Acts 9:3-9, 17, 18.

Saul of Tarsus headed for Damascus to continue his work of persecuting the followers of Jesus. On the road to Damascus, Saul met the Lord Jesus Christ. His question and the Lord's answer reveal the Holy Spirit conviction that troubled his spirit. Acts 9:5 states, "And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Saul had a choice to make. He could yield to the conviction, repent of his sinful condition, trust in the Lord, ask for God's salvation and be immediately and eternally saved, or he could reject God's offer. He asked for and received God's salvation.

Saul's first question as a child of God revealed his changed life and the desire of the new nature already alive within him. Acts 9:6 states, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The Lord directed Saul to the place

where he could obey God in the matter of scriptural baptism.

When Saul met Ananias, he accepted the instruction to receive scriptural baptism. Scriptural baptism requires a proper candidate (a child of God), a proper authority (New Testament church), a proper method (immersion) and a proper purpose (obedience and identification with Christ, not for the purpose of being saved). Baptism is after salvation. It is not a sacrament. It has no saving power. When offering scriptural baptism to Saul, Ananias revealed he believed Saul's profession of faith and recognized him as a child of God. He said, "Brother Saul" (verse 17). Ananias regarded Saul as a brother in Christ, therefore a qualified candidate for scriptural baptism. Baptism is only for saved ones. If a candidate for baptism is not saved when entering the water, he is not saved when he comes out of the water. Scriptural baptism requires a child of God.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Matthew 28:19, 20. Jesus spoke to His church concerning its authority and responsibility to carry out the commands of the Great Commission. Jesus gave the

Great Commission to the church as an institution. He did not give the Great Commission to the apostles. There is no such thing as apostolic succession. If the apostles had received the Great Commission, their deaths would have ended the authority for Great Commission work. The same is true if Jesus had given the Great Commission to a group of disciples. It is also true if Jesus had just given the Great Commission to the church at Jerusalem, which at some future point ceased to exist. Jesus gave the Great Commission to the church as an institution so that each New Testament church through the end of the church age would have the proper authority to carry out its commands.

Jesus called out the eleven charter members of His church to meet Him at an appointed place and time. On the mountain in Galilee, the head of the church met with His church. The church was a local, visible body of scripturally baptized believers whom God had covenanted together. Jesus gave them their marching orders. He began by giving His church the authority to do His work. He said, "All power is given unto me" (Matt. 28:18). The word *power* means "authority." Jesus stated He had all authority. The rule of specification applies. When God specifies one thing, He forbids all others. No other individual, group or religious organization has Jesus' authority to do the work of the Great Commission. He gave it to His church as an institution. Based on the undeniable fact that Jesus has all authority, He commissioned His churches to do a particular work.

Jesus commissioned New Testament churches to go forth and preach the gospel to all nations. All nations include "every creature" (Mark 16:15). All nations include "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Upon the hearing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, some

will be saved. Jesus commanded His churches to teach them "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Part of the teaching includes the subject of scriptural baptism. Jesus instructed His churches to teach every saved person to receive scriptural baptism. He also gave it the authority to baptize believers. Jesus promised His power and His presence to be with New Testament churches as they carry out the work of the Great Commission. He said, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). The word *world* means "age." Jesus promised His presence and power to be with New Testament churches that carry out the work of the Great Commission until the end of the church age.

Jesus did not authorize New Testament churches to do every good work or even much-needed works. Applying the aforementioned rule of specification, He did specify that His churches do Great Commission work. No other work attempted by churches has the promise of His presence or His power. Jesus sent forth New Testament churches to do a spiritual work, not a social work. His purpose was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He gave emphasis to the spiritual nature of their work when He said, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47, 48). Jesus intended the Great Commission to be marching orders and to be a mandate for the work He wanted His churches to do. John 20:21 states, "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Jesus restated the Great Commission before His ascension. Acts 1:8 states, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem,

and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” There can be no misunderstanding that the work of New Testament churches is a soul-winning, preaching, teaching, baptizing work.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 3:7, 8, 13-17. The baptism of John the Baptist always required a profession of faith (verse 7). Only children of God were baptized. The decision to repent requires more than the understanding of an infant. When Jesus came to be baptized by John the Baptist, He came as the only begotten Son of God. He had no sins. He was already the Son of God. Jesus set the example for every child of God. Every believer who receives scriptural baptism pleases God. Jesus said of baptism, “It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” (verse 15). *Becometh* means “appropriate, necessary, fitting, suitable or well-pleasing.” After His baptism, Jesus received the Father’s audible approval when He said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (verse 17).

John 3:22, 23. Jesus called out His church from among the scripturally saved ones who were disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus and John the Baptist agreed on the terms necessary for baptism. Both preached repentance. Matthew 4:17 states, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Both required an intelligent choice to receive Christ by faith. Repentance demands an acceptance of one’s sinful condition, an agreement with God that one is a sinner, a godly sorrow for sin and a turning to God seeking His forgiveness and His salvation. Both required a profession of faith before baptism. Both required much water for immersion.

Acts 2:38-41. Peter preached to a mixed crowd on the day of Pentecost. Some were saved and some were lost. After he preached, there were both saved and lost present. To the lost, Peter invited, “Repent.” To the saved, Peter challenged, “Be baptized.” Peter’s invitation to baptism included only those who were aware their sins had been forgiven. The word *for* means “because of,” not “in order to become.” A thief goes to jail for stealing. He does not wait to become a thief while in jail. He is already a thief. The child of God receives baptism because he is already a child of God. Infants cannot understand the need for repentance and do not have the awareness to recognize the point at which their sins have been forgiven.

Acts 8:36-38. The Ethiopian came to know Christ while sitting in his chariot on the road south of Jerusalem. Philip required his profession of faith in verse 37. Some Bible translations footnote verse 37, thereby omitting it from the rest of the passage. Without verse 37, one may come to the conclusion that baptism may be received upon demand with no other requirements. Do not be so unwise as to put confidence in any Bible version that attempts to destroy the clear biblical teaching on scriptural baptism. The Ethiopian gladly gave his profession of faith. Satisfied that the Ethiopian was already a child of God, Philip and the Ethiopian got out of the chariot and went into the water. They both went down into the water and they both came up out of the water. The Bible states the Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing” (verse 39). The Ethiopian understood that his obedience in baptism pleased God.

Acts 10:47, 48. Those saved after the preaching of Peter at the household of Cornelius gave evidence of their salvation. Peter accepted that evidence of salvation as fulfilling the requirement of baptizing only saved ones when he

asked, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized" (verse 47). Cornelius had gathered his relatives and his close friends (verse 24). Those who were baptized were able to hear the Word and to receive it (verses 43, 44). When Peter rehearsed the matter for the brethren in Judea, it was probably the church at Jerusalem. They all concluded, "God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). The Bible does not mention infants in this passage nor does it say baptism gave them new life in Christ.

Acts 16:15, 33. The Philippian jailer and his family were saved and then received scriptural baptism. The jailer and his family heard Paul and Silas speak "the word of the Lord" (verse 32). Salvation requires the understanding of a need to call upon the Lord (Rom. 10:13, 14, 17). Baptism requires the understanding that one has already been saved. The jailer's whole household, including "he and all his," were immediately baptized (Acts 16:33). The Bible clearly states that each one in the jailer's household believed in God (verse 34). Although it was a household setting, there is no mention of any infants in the household. Each person baptized was of sufficient age to realize they were accountable to God for their own sinful condition.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

The perversion of infant baptism remains one of the most widely accepted religious errors. All religious people may be divided into two groups—those who believe in salvation by grace through faith plus nothing and those who believe in salvation by works. Romans 11:6 states, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." The biblical choice—the

right choice—is that salvation must be only by grace through faith plus nothing. Ephesians 2:8, 9 states, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Salvation is not by baptism; it is only by faith.

Three Scriptures are often used to try to teach the error of infant baptism. The idea of infant baptism presupposes that baptism will save. (See Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38 and 1 Peter 3:21.) Mark 16:16 does not teach that those who receive baptism will be eternally saved. This passage states that he that believes and is saved should be baptized. It also states that those who do not believe and are not saved shall be condemned. This interpretation is in harmony with the rest of the Bible concerning salvation and baptism. The explanation of Acts 2:38 was given in the section Background Scripture. In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter states that baptism is a figure. Baptism is symbolic of the new birth that already occurred. It is a symbolic representation of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It symbolizes that the child of God has already received the forgiveness of sins. It symbolizes the truth that the child of God who correctly follows Holy Spirit leadership by receiving scriptural baptism has a clear conscience before God. Baptism is the first act of obedience God requires after one is saved.

While many denominations teach infant baptism and believe that their form of baptism will impart salvation to the recipient, they produce the same results as the Pharisees. Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). The Pharisees trusted in their works for salvation. Those who accept

infant baptism trust in that work for salvation. All who fail to trust in Christ face eternity in hell.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Baptist heritage reveals a fight against the perversion of infant baptism that has continued for more than fifteen hundred years. Constantine had a question about baptismal regeneration that should be considered by every adherent of infant baptism. He asked, "If I am saved from my sins by baptism, what is to become of my sins which I may commit after I am baptized?" (J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, Pensacola: wfbi Press, page 21.) The question so both-

ered him that he postponed his form of baptism until near death. How many baptisms would one need to have all his sins washed away, if one believed that heresy? Can some sins be washed away by baptism and other sins by any other method? False doctrine always puts one in an indefensible position.

The perversion of infant baptism has no precedent in Scripture. There is no verse that teaches it, no command to practice it and no example of it. Infant baptism is an invention of men. Those who stand by Bible truth will be as opposed to infant baptism as the forefathers in the faith were fifteen hundred years ago.

Baptist Heritage and the Perversion of the Lord's Supper

Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

Background Scripture: Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 10:21; 11:17-22.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain the many unscriptural beliefs that are perpetrated concerning the Lord's Supper.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

One Body, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17.

The church members at Corinth had some problems in their observance of the Lord's Supper. Paul wrote to set in order things that needed correction at Corinth. Some of those matters related to the Lord's Supper. They had turned the memorial supper of the Lord's death into a fellowship meal. They also permitted some to participate in the Lord's Supper who were guilty of moral offenses. Paul introduced the subject of the Lord's Supper by reminding them of its sacred nature. The Lord's Supper is not a sacrament. It has no magical, mysterious or saving power. Paul taught that the Lord's Supper was a memorial that symbolized the blood of Christ and the body of Christ.

Paul explained that the Lord's Supper was for the local church. Their practice involved one cup and one bread. All church members in good standing were eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper. Paul said, "For we are all partakers of that one bread" (verse 17). He taught the church at Corinth that it was one body in Christ. *One* means "only one." *Bread*

means "loaf." The one cup and the one loaf picture Christ's sinless body and pure blood. All church members who were not in good standing with the church were not eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper. Paul said, "With such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11). Paul's teaching concerning the Lord's Supper was closed communion.

The popular observance of the Lord's Supper in many places is called open communion. Open communion is the practice to permit any person who claims to be saved to partake of the Lord's Supper. Popularity is not the standard for right and wrong in any of the doctrines God has given. God designed the Lord's Supper for the local church body to honor the broken body of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that the Lord's Supper is restricted to members of a local New Testament church.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. He addressed the letter "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). He admonished them to "keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1 Cor. 11:2). He

began to deal with the Lord's Supper in verse 18. It has been aptly stated that the Lord's Supper is by the church, for the church, in the church, of the church and to the church. These prepositions remind one that the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper is restricted to members of a local New Testament church.

Paul received his knowledge of the Lord's Supper by divine revelation. He said it was that which "I have received" (verse 23). He was responsible to deliver it to the church at Corinth without alteration. Any changes would mar the picture the Lord's Supper represents. The Lord's Supper is a memorial that symbolically pictures the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me" (verse 24). Although the time interval is not specified in the Bible, each New Testament church is responsible to observe the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. *Do* means "appoint, execute, fulfill, keep or observe."

The church at Corinth needed to know the truth about the origin of the Lord's Supper. It is not a Christian ordinance or a fellowship meal. Jesus instituted it on the night He was arrested when He met privately with His church. The Lord's Supper is a part of the "all things" Jesus commanded New Testament churches to teach to observe. (See Matthew 28:20.)

The elements of the Lord's Supper were those elements that were available at the time of the Passover. Jesus ate the last Passover with His church. After that meal, He took the fruit of the vine and the unleavened bread and shared it with the members as symbols of His pure blood and sinless body. A careful examination of the events of that evening, made by comparing the gospels, reveals Judas Iscariot had already left before the Lord's Supper was given. The physical body of Jesus was "broken for you," the

church body (1 Cor. 11:24). *You* is plural, a corporate word referring to the church gathered around Jesus. Acts 20:28 states, "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Each New Testament church is blood-bought.

The Lord's Supper is a sacred memorial to be observed in the proper manner. *Worthily* refers to manner, attitude or bearing. Some erroneously say the blood of Jesus makes them worthy to come to the Lord's table. God's order is salvation, scriptural baptism, church membership and then the Lord's Supper. (See Acts 2:21, 42.) Each New Testament church is one body in Christ (Rom. 12:4, 5; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). Those who failed to discern the sacred nature of the Lord's Supper at Corinth either got sick or died. At the Lord's Supper each church member should concentrate on Jesus and His death.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:26-29. Jesus gave the first Lord's Supper to His church while Judas had gone to betray Him. Jesus prayed, broke the bread and then gave it to the church members. He reminded them that the unleavened bread was a symbol of His physical body. He prayed, took the cup and gave it to each church member to drink. He reminded them it was a symbol of the blood He would shed and of the power of His blood to forgive sins. He included a promise for the future in this memorial feast when He said, "Until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (verse 29). They concluded the Lord's Supper by singing a hymn and then departed from that place. (See Matthew 26:30.)

1 Corinthians 5:11. The only way to keep the ordinance of the Lord's Supper pure is by not participating in it with

those who are immoral or tainted by false religion. A “fornicator” is one who commits fornication, a whoremonger or a prostitute. A “covetous” person is one who is so eager for gain that he will defraud others. An “idolater” is one who engages in image worship or any type of false worship. A “railer” refers to one who uses abusive speech, a mischief-maker, a busybody or one who speaks of others in a derogatory manner. A “drunkard” is a sot, one who is tipsy. An “extortioner” is one who takes from others by force. Church members who are guilty of these things are not in good standing with the church. Paul said, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company.” These church members were not to come to the Lord’s table. Paul said, “With such an one no not to eat.”

1 Corinthians 10:21. Church members must be separated from devilish or demonic things to come to the Lord’s table with clean hands and a clean heart. It is evident that Paul had reference to the idol temples in Corinth where church members were tempted to go and eat. God’s principle of separation honors the Lord’s table above all others. Second Corinthians 6:16, 17 states, “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” New Testament church members do not have the right to participate in the Lord’s Supper anywhere except the church of their membership.

1 Corinthians 11:17-22. Paul began to speak of the Lord’s Supper in terms of when the church would “come together” (verse 17). There is no scriptural basis for a private partaking of the Lord’s Supper. It is for the church when gathered together. A church that has divisions cannot be in unity enough to properly

observe the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper should be temporarily postponed until a particular church can restore unity (Gal. 6:1). A church must not observe the Lord’s Supper with members who embrace heresy. Paul said there were “heresies among you” (1 Cor. 11:19). The Bible teaches, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). There can be no “one faith” if different church members hold different beliefs (Titus 3:10; Jude 3). Paul also stated the Lord’s Supper is not a fellowship meal.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Although the Lord’s Supper had been perverted at Corinth, Paul still considered Corinth a church. By that token, a present-day church that has perverted the Lord’s Supper is still a church. A popular practice in many churches today is to permit nonmembers to observe the Lord’s Supper. This is perversion and is not taught in the Bible.

The idea of infant baptism rejected by the forefathers in the Baptist heritage led to infant communion. “Infants were not only baptized, but received into the church, and being church members, they were supposed to be entitled to the Lord’s Supper. How to administer it to them was a problem, but it was solved by soaking the bread” (Carroll, page 27). One error leads to another. Any departure from the truth of the Bible is a tangent that continually moves further away from the truth. Such is the result of open communion. Other errors soon follow, such as embracing the universal, invisible church heresy and receiving alien immersion. The perversion called open communion leads churches away from the truth.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

In every place where there are houses of worship, there are many different

forms for the Lord's Supper. The biblical observance in a New Testament church is called closed communion. It is so markedly different from the popular perversions that it angers visitors who feel mistreated by being barred from the Lord's table. If a New Testament church is to be a light on a hill, then it must shine brighter by the witness of the truth (Matt. 5:14). If a New Testament church seeks to act like all the other religious congregations, it may pervert the Lord's Supper and practice open communion.

Your church membership is important. If a New Testament church has turned away from the truth to open communion and is unwilling to recant, the church member must either accept that doctrinal error or seek church member-

ship elsewhere. When a church practices open communion, one may be sure other errors will follow. A New Testament church is not a Protestant congregation. When a New Testament church practices open communion, teaches and believes in the universal, invisible church heresy and finally moves to accept alien immersion, there is no difference between it and a Protestant congregation. Jesus warned the church at Ephesus to "repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place" (Rev. 2:5). When the candlestick is removed, the authority is gone and the church ceases to exist even though the congregation still gathers for a form of worship.

It's I t r th ny uthnk. r r n w



Baptist Churches and Freedom of Conscience

Lesson Text: John 8:32-36.

Background Scripture: Acts 23:1; 2 Corinthians 6:11-18; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 3:9; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Peter 3:16, 21.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss the fact that Baptists have always been promoters of freedom of conscience.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Paul's Pure Conscience, Acts 24:16.

A conscience may be pure or defiled, good or bad, righteous or evil. The word *conscience* means "perception, awareness or understanding." The Bible trained and Spirit-led conscience is the only kind to follow. The Bible reveals that the conscience is the place where conviction is felt (John 8:9). The Holy Spirit bears witness within the conscience of a child of God (2 Cor. 1:12). God wrote His laws in the heart of the natural man (Rom. 2:15). Paul made sure his conscience remained in tune with God and man.

A conscience in tune with God demands a right relationship and fellowship with God. The right relationship with God can only come by repentance, faith and asking for God's salvation. Romans 10:9, 10 states, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The right fellowship can only

come by continuing to repent and to seek God's forgiveness for sins. First John 1:9 states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." One must be sure his conscience is pure before God before it can be void of offense toward men.

Paul lived by the rule of conscience that required him to be void of offense toward all men. He lived by the Golden Rule. Luke 6:31 states, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." The word *exercise* means "to strive." Paul trained himself not to be offensive. Those who seek a pure conscience that is void of offense toward all men will implement the Bible method as needed. (See Matthew 5:23-26.) Every church member must maintain a conscience void of offense toward God and men.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

John 8:32-36 Jesus spoke to saved Jews concerning a conscience void of offense toward God. He urged them to "continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (verse 31). He assured them they would "know the truth, and

the truth shall make you free" (verse 32). At the point of their salvation, children of God receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the conscience of saved people concerning the truth. First Timothy 2:4, 5 states, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Those saved Jews had yet to realize the only way to please God is by following Jesus Christ.

Jesus seeks every child of God to become His disciple. A *disciple* is a learner or a pupil. A true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must continue in His Word. Second Timothy 2:15 states, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Jesus' desire for the saved Jews was that they follow His Word. They tried to live in the past. They said, "We be Abraham's seed" (John 8:33). When Jesus is the master teacher and a child of God is His disciple, one must go forward accepting Jesus as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

The saved Jews knew their consciences were not right with God. They lied to cover up the fact of their disobedience to God. They said they were "never in bondage to any man" (John 8:33). Jesus knew their sin. He said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (verse 34). Paul understood the struggle of the new nature striving to overcome the old nature. Romans 7:25 states, "With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Although the saved Jews had the new nature, they had continued to live according to the flesh. Their fleshly lives centered on the Old Testament or Old Covenant. Jesus came to bring men to an awareness of the New Testament or New Covenant. Those saved Jews had not yet

come to understand that the new covenant in Jesus Christ included a better priesthood, a better High Priest, a better sacrifice and a better temple. The book of Hebrews gives the detailed explanation for saved Jews to come to a proper understanding of the better way in Jesus Christ. Until the saved Jews began to follow Jesus Christ in daily life and in worship, they could not have a pure conscience before God.

Jesus wanted the saved Jews to realize He set them free from the bondage of the Law. He said, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Jesus put the Law out of the way, having fulfilled it completely. Colossians 2:14 states, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." The book of Galatians urges saved Jews not to come under the yoke of the Law again. Galatians 2:4, 5 states, "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Jesus expects every saved person to go forward for Him by continuing in the truth of the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ sets men free from the bondage of God's Law given to Israel.

Jesus urged the saved Jews to follow the heavenly Father as He did. He said, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father" (John 8:38). They continued to follow the traditional teachings received from their earthly Jewish fathers. Those who follow the heavenly Father must allow the Word of God to dwell in them richly by prayer, study and obedience.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Acts 23:1, 2. Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin concerning the accusations that had been made against him. The Sanhedrin was the highest court in the land of Israel. It had seventy-one members including Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and Gamaliel. The chief officer was the high priest. The court had a limited authority over religious, civil and criminal matters. Paul was probably a member of this group before he was saved. The Sanhedrin was divided into two groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Paul declared his intention was to live “in all good conscience before God” (Acts 23:1). He believed in the freedom to serve God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

2 Corinthians 6:11-18. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to strive to have a pure conscience void of offense before God and men. A pure conscience before God requires children of God to “touch not the unclean thing” (verse 17). This admonition included the unequal yoke of believers with unbelievers, the fellowship of the temple of God with the fellowship of false worship and the lifestyle of the godly not imitating the lifestyle of the ungodly. Paul taught them to practice the principle of separation. He said, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (verse 17). He believed the church members at Corinth had the freedom to serve God according to the truth and the responsibility to recognize the freedom others had to be unclean before God, to live an ungodly life-style or to participate in false worship if they chose. Paul believed in the freedom of conscience for every person.

1 Timothy 1:5, 19. Paul taught Timothy to obey God’s commandment by a pure heart filled with love for God. The particular commandment he referred to was “charge some that they teach no

other doctrine” (verse 3). A good conscience includes obedience, a loving heart and purity of motive and manner. A church member may serve acceptably by this rule in the work of restoration or in seeking to help a church member avoid church discipline. When God’s people proceed with a genuine faith, they will have a good conscience before God and man. A good conscience will warn one concerning the shipwreck of the faith when one departs from the truth in some way.

1 Timothy 3:9. The “mystery of the faith” refers to the New Testament church (Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; Col. 1:26; 2:2; 4:3). Paul stated that one qualification of a deacon was to make all his dealings with the church leave him a clear conscience. This qualification requires a deacon to serve without covetousness, partiality or seeking revenge. Every church member should have a clear conscience concerning his dealings with the church of his membership. The qualifications for deacons and pastors are the same standards by which every church member should live. From among those church members who strive to live by those qualifications, God calls preachers and churches select deacons. Pastors, deacons and church members should maintain a good conscience in all their dealings with the church of their membership.

Hebrews 13:18. Paul’s prayer request was for saved Jews to pray with him that he might continue to have a good conscience before God and man. A good conscience before God requires repentance, salvation, repentance, scriptural baptism, repentance, church membership and more repentance. A periodic self-examination to properly present oneself at the Lord’s table helps church members have a good conscience before God. A good conscience before man involves “in all things willing to live honestly.”

Paul said he had “wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man” (2 Cor. 7:2).

1 Peter 3:16, 21. A good conscience rests on the foundation of a good conversation. *Conversation* means “behavior or life-style.” Although the servant of Christ may often be accused of evil things, it should be a false accusation. Joseph was falsely accused concerning the matter with Potiphar’s wife. He suffered imprisonment, embarrassment and rejection due to the false accusation. God knew his innocence in the matter. The behavior and life-style of every church member should be above reproach. Philippians 2:15, 16 states, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.” A good conscience that leads to a life above reproach builds a bright witness.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Freedom of conscience is not only the freedom to practice what one believes but also the willingness to fight for the rights of others to practice what they believe even if it is opposed to the truth. The Baptist heritage of the forefathers in the faith reveals a firm belief in freedom of conscience for all. When the Anabaptists came to America, they came seeking freedom of religion. “Persecutions, in England, and on the continent, were, at least, among the prime causes which led to the first settlement of the first United States Colonies” (Carroll, page 54). Baptists in America championed the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States of America that guaranteed religious freedom to all.

The battle for freedom of religion in America did not come easily or cheaply. “Baptists seem to have fought that battle

entirely alone, but they did not fight it for themselves alone, but for all peoples of every religious faith” (Carroll, page 57). “One of the greatest obstructions to religious liberty in America, and probably all over the world as to that, was the conviction which had grown into the people throughout the preceding centuries that religion could not possibly live without governmental support. That no denomination could prosper solely on voluntary offerings by its adherents” (Carroll, page 61). The heritage of Baptist churches all the way back to the church Jesus began was to rely on the tithes and offerings of the members.

The history of the Baptists records a heritage of God’s multiplying little to accomplish much. When God’s people become aware of a need, God burdens their hearts to satisfy it. This New Testament practice led churches to cooperate in supporting the mission efforts of the apostle Paul. Some church members provided hospitality to traveling preachers. Some churches cooperated in meeting the needs of the brethren of like faith and order in Judea that experienced suffering due to famine. Church members were instructed to give systematically for the support of the ministry and the expenses of the church. Freedom of religion without governmental funds had never hindered Baptists in their work for the Lord.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Faith-based social services by religious groups in America have recently been approved to receive governmental funding. There are two problems with faith-based social services receiving governmental funding. The first problem is that, when there is governmental funding, there is some measure of governmental control and a corresponding loss of religious freedom. The second prob-

lem is that God did not authorize New Testament churches to engage in social services. The Great Commission defines the work of the Lord's churches. Matthew 28:19, 20 states, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Faith-based social services result in the loss of some religious liberty, finances, efforts and time fulfilling the work God commissioned the churches to do.

There are many places in the world where religious freedom remains a hope for the future. Believers are persecuted on at least three continents. Several nations have laws restricting or denying religious freedom to all but a state approved religion. In some places, religious groups have to register with the government. Some in China attend underground churches, use Bibles that have been smuggled into the country and worship according to the dictates of their conscience with the knowledge that at any moment soldiers or law enforcement officials may charge in with weapons to arrest them.

Baptist Heritage and the World System

Lesson Text: 1 John 2:15-17.

Background Scripture: Matthew 8:34; John 8:23; 17:14, 16; Romans 12:2; Titus 2:12; James 4:4; 1 John 3:1; 4:4, 5.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand that even though they are in the world, if they are saved, they are not of the world.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The Light of the World, Matthew 5:14-16.

Jesus told His church that it was the light of the world. He knew His church could not love the world and be the light of the world at the same time. He said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). *Mammon* means "wealth, greed or the material things of the world." Jesus wanted His church members to realize they could not be shining witnesses for Christ in the world if they lived like the world. He gave the Sermon on the Mount to instruct His churches concerning the way to live and to worship so that they would remain the light of the world.

Jesus spoke of a church as a light bearer or candlestick. Every child of God has the light and life of Jesus Christ within him. When believers are scripturally baptized and become church members, they put their light on the candlestick, or in a local church. Revelation 1:20 states, "The seven candlesticks

which thou sawest are the seven churches." A New Testament church should have a bright, powerful witness for God like a city on a hill. Many have seen the lights of a city on a hill while traveling at night. The world is in spiritual darkness that can only be pierced by true churches holding forth the light of the message of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

What causes a New Testament church to shine brightly before the world? It will happen when church members live holy lives, witness to the lost and prove their love for one another so that even the unsaved and the untaught recognize that a church has something better to offer than the world. John 13:35 states, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Church members who take pride in their facility, in generously supporting their pastor, give sacrificially to scriptural missions and do works of benevolence shine in a dark world.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

1 John 2:15-17. The apostle John wrote to churches and church members concerning living a life of full joy in a wicked world. The world system offers

many ways by which one is supposed to find joy. Some turn to work, some to family, some to alcohol addiction, some to drug addiction, some to an immoral life-style and others follow the idea of doing what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6). Those believers who seek to continue in fellowship with God must acknowledge their sins and seek God's forgiveness on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus (1 John 1:6—2:2). John describes full joy in terms of the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ and remaining in fellowship with God (1 John 1:1-5). Fellowship with God also requires keeping His commandments (1 John 2:3-6). Fellowship with God enables one to maintain good relationships with others (verses 7-11). New believers and those who have been saved for many years need repeatedly to seek God's forgiveness of sin, overcome the temptations of the devil by God's power and make sure the Word of God grows within (verses 12-14). Full joy for a child of God will never come by loving the world.

John reminds each church member not to love the world. The love for the world and the love for God are mutually exclusive. *Love* is *agapao*, the sacrificial, unselfish and unconditional love. The *world* is the world system, the orderly arrangement, including its inhabitants, its possessions and all material things. Every child of God must make the choice between loving the things of the world or loving the things of God. Moses made the right choice. Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb. 11:25, 26). The same choice to love God or to love the things of the world must be made by each child of God daily, even many times a day.

John described the way the world system works in the lives of men. He listed three things: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. The flesh comes with its own set of likes and dislikes. The fleshly nature consists of bodily passions, mental pleasures and emotional attachments. *Lust* means "to long after what is forbidden or to have an evil desire." Every human must deal with the lust of the flesh. One may indulge or deny self. The trigger mechanism for the lust of the flesh is the lust of the eye. This is illustrated by nudity. When Adam and Eve sinned, "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7). Pornography triggers the lust of the flesh through the eyes. Sin conceived in thought soon becomes sin in action. The fulfillment of the sin that begins in the mind and heart is assured by the pride of life. *Pride* is self-confidence or boasting. When one fails to rely on God, sin enters the actions. The world system leads men to self-destruct by following the path of sin.

John contrasted the temporary world system with the eternal plan of God. James 1:15 states, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." After the world passes away and the lust of the flesh passes away, sin brings eternal condemnation and torment for those without Jesus Christ as Savior. Those who are saved will live forever with God. If a child of God chooses to live his life in sin, he will still be saved but he will be ashamed at the Judgment Seat of Christ (John 3:16; John 5:24; Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 8:34. The world system leads people to reject Jesus Christ. After Jesus demonstrated His almighty power

in an indisputable fashion, the people wanted nothing to do with Him. Some lost their livelihood, loving money more than God. Others loved the opinions of men more than they loved God. These people made the worldly choice.

John 8:23. Jesus came from Heaven with different ways, thoughts, desires and goals (Isa. 55:8, 9). Those who choose to live like the world will not be satisfied to live according to God's plan. Children of God should be dominated by the new nature and live according to God's plan. Carnal believers live like the world.

John 17:14, 16. The world hates the moral principles and doctrines of the Bible. At the point of salvation, one's spirit is sanctified. *Sanctify* means "to purify or make holy by being separated from sin." Those who choose to follow biblical standards will separate themselves from sin.

Romans 12:2. The plain, simple command is "be not conformed to this world." God expects His children to be transformed. *Conformed* means "to follow the pattern." *Transformed* means "to be changed or to be different." Children of God must make the difficult choices to follow God's pattern and not the world's.

Titus 2:12. The way to live godly in this wicked world is to start by "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts." The godly life is a life lived "soberly, righteously." *Soberly* means "ruled by a sound mind or to show moderation." *Righteously* means "justly or fairly." Obviously, these things are different from the worldly life.

James 4:4. James puts the choice of the love of the world or the love for God in terms of spiritual adultery. *Spiritual adultery* is loving anything more than God. It may be false worship or the worship of a family member. The child of

God must be true, loyal and pure for God.

1 John 3:1. God's love and God's holiness are rejected by the world. (See Romans 1:18-32.) The world will reject any child of God who attempts to be like Christ so much that they are convicted of their sinful ways. Children of God who are content in the world are too much like the world.

1 John 4:4, 5. Children of God have the power to overcome the temptations of the world because God dwells in them. God's power is greater than any other power. Children of God who rely on God's power have victory over temptation. Those who fail to rely on God's power are defeated by temptation.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

When God's people permit culture to be their watchword rather than holiness, one recognizes that the Laodicean era of the church age is flourishing. Revelation 3:16, 17 states, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." The word *culture* refers to the world's viewpoint. Are God's people still called to be a distinctive, identifiable group that lives differently than the world (Rom. 12:2)? If God's people are no different than the culture in which they live, they blend in with the world with no power or influence as a witness for God. Church members are losing the cultural war because they are becoming so much like the culture that they have abandoned personal holiness.

Culture is the product of the world's opinions and the world's values. If worldliness is labeled *culture*, God's people may be sure that culture is secu-

larizing church members and pastors. Church members must choose whether they will serve the worldly culture or the one true God. When worldliness is labeled *culture*, church members may rejoice in adopting and applauding pagan life-styles and heathenish worship practices. The cultured people believe it is wrong to espouse a narrow, absolute standard of right and wrong or of sound doctrine.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

God still seeks church members to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15, 16). Church members who are tuned in to God and His Word can still recognize what is crooked and perverse. *Crooked* means “warped.” The world’s

ways are warped. *Perverse* means “distorted, corrupted or misinterpreted.” The world has turned away from what is right, choosing instead to worship at the altar of culture. Church members who dare to be different from the world will shine as lights.

Shine as lights refers to appearance, being seen or make manifest. Church members need enough of the fire of God in their hearts to justify the world’s seeing their difference and hearing their message. The only way to get the fire of God in the heart is to be devoted to Bible study. Luke 24:32 states, “And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” A lack of Bible study has resulted in a generation of church members who are too much like the world. Matthew 24:12 states, “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Baptist Heritage and the Doctrine of Faithfulness

Lesson Text: Acts 16:14, 15.

Background Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 4:7, 9; 1 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 3:2-5; Revelation 2:13.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain that faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord and His churches have been a Baptist priority then and now.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Faithful Abraham, Genesis 18:17-19.

God honored Abraham's faithfulness. Faithfulness places a child of God in the position to have a greater understanding in spiritual things. God made Abraham aware of His coming judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was faithful to pray for the wicked cities of the plains. He labored repeatedly in intercessory prayer seeking God's best according to His will and purpose. God honored Abraham and gave him the best answer that would be acceptable to God's holy, righteous and just nature.

God blessed Abraham's faithfulness. Abraham's faithfulness to God placed him in a position to influence Israel and all the nations of the world. God's unfaithful people have little or no influence on the world around them. Abraham became a blessing to the world by living a life of faithfulness unto the Lord.

God commended Abraham for his faithfulness. His faithfulness consisted of leading "his children and his household after him" (Gen. 18:19). Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way

he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Building a Christian family requires faithful parents. Abraham's faithfulness included keeping "the way of the LORD" (Gen. 18:19). He was faithful to learn, to do and to teach God's way. First Samuel 12:23, 24 states, "I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart." Abraham's faithfulness was manifest in his commitment to "do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). *Justice* is right or virtuous. *Judgment* means "verdict." Abraham made a mental decision to do things the right way. He faithfully followed the path of doing right even though he was a saved sinner. The Bible clearly reveals his sins as well as his faithfulness. *Faithful* denotes trusted or reliable. Abraham's faithfulness marked the direction of his life as a friend of God (James 2:23).

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Acts 16:14, 15. Lydia's faithfulness began with the response to the gospel. She lived in Philippi and she was a native of the city of Thyatira. She sold the purple-dyed garments from her native town. Evidently, she was a

wealthy woman. Lydia was also a religious woman. Her Jewish form of worship required a place with water, such as a riverside. The ritual cleansings could be performed there. She was religious but lost. Paul and his missionary companions met her at the riverside and shared the gospel with her. She was saved. The first step in faithfulness is to know the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Lydia heard Paul preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. She was saved.

The second step in faithfulness is baptism. The same river used for ritual cleansing provided ample water for scriptural baptism. *Scriptural baptism* is the immersion of a believer in water by the authority of a New Testament church for the purpose of obeying the command of and identifying with Jesus Christ. Paul baptized by the authority of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). The word *baptized* is *baptizo*. It means "to immerse or to submerge." Its meaning could not be more clear. The word for sprinkling is *rhantizo*, obviously a different word (Heb. 12:24). The word for pouring is *ballo* (John 13:5). It is also a different word. Jesus' baptism, Lydia's baptism and the Ethiopian's baptism all reveal enough water for an immersion (Matt. 3:13-17; Acts 8:38, 39). Total immersion is the only practice for baptism found in the New Testament. Any believer who chooses the path of faithfulness will seek scriptural baptism. Lydia received scriptural baptism as the next step in a life of faithfulness.

Lydia remained faithful after her baptism. She became a member of the church at Antioch. When the church at Philippi was organized, she became a member there. She probably invited the church to meet in her house. Active church membership is the next step in faithfulness. Hebrews 10:25 states, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but

exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Faithfulness is not optional; it is required. Lydia was faithful to her church membership.

How does the Bible explain faithfulness? The church at Jerusalem practiced faithfulness. They "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). Faithfulness included worship, Bible study, fellowship, observing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and prayer. Church members such as Lydia would be present for every service of the church. Church members who are frequent attenders who observe the Lord's Supper rarely, if ever, are not faithful. Church members who have no significant prayer lives are not faithful. Lydia was faithful to encourage her household and probably others to be saved and then to follow the Lord in scriptural baptism. Acts 16:15 states, "She was baptized, and her household." Lydia understood that faithfulness included much more than being present for worship.

Lydia recognized that her usefulness in serving the Lord demanded faithfulness. She said, "If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there" (verse 15). The matter was so important to her that Paul said she "constrained us" (verse 15). *Constrained* means "to compel or to insist." Her invitation was not just politeness. Hospitality such as Lydia's was the New Testament norm for churches to meet, for visiting preachers and missionaries to receive the necessary care in their travels and for church members in times of fellowship with one another. The church at Jerusalem had fellowship "from house to house" (Acts 2:46). Church members should be "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13.) Lydia's faithfulness gave her the opportunity to be used of God.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 4:2. Paul taught the church members at Corinth to be faithful. He described faithfulness in terms of stewardship. A *steward* is an employee who serves as a manager, overseer or treasurer with responsibilities over the employer's household. Joseph was a faithful steward in Potiphar's household. Genesis 39:4 states, "And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand." *Faithful* means "trustworthy, sure or reliable." Every church member should be trustworthy and reliable. Faithful church members will be found reliable on Sunday night, on Wednesday night and on other occasions when called upon.

Colossians 4:7, 9. Paul considered Tychicus to be a faithful minister. Tychicus was a companion of Paul's on one of his missionary journeys (Acts 20:4). At the time of this writing, Tychicus was with Paul in Rome. At the time of his later imprisonment, Paul counted Tychicus trustworthy enough to rely on him. Second Timothy 4:12 states, "And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus." His faithfulness made him both "a beloved brother" and a "fellow servant in the Lord" (Col. 4:7). Having been with Paul on a missionary journey and in Rome when Paul was imprisoned, he proved himself faithful in good times and in difficult times. Tychicus is a good example of faithfulness for preachers and for church members.

1 Timothy 1:12. God considered Paul faithful. God calls preachers from among the ranks of faithful church members. After Paul's salvation, he was baptized by Ananias in Damascus by the authority of the church there. He then began to preach (Acts 9:19, 20). His preaching began after his faithfulness for "certain days" (verse 19). God blesses

with His enabling power the faithful male church members called into the ministry to do the work He has called them to do. Part of Paul's faithfulness included accepting and fulfilling the role of service God had for him. Paul said God put him into the ministry. God still puts faithful church members in the role of service He chooses for them.

Hebrews 3:2-5. Moses' faithfulness was a type of Christ's faithfulness. The Old Testament types and shadows give the form. The New Testament fulfillment of the type gives the substance to the form. Jesus Christ was faithful in all God the Father gave Him to do. He completely finished the work of salvation. He paid it all (1 Peter 1:18,19). He purchased the blood-bought New Testament church (Acts 20:28). Moses' faithfulness pointed to the Christ, the Messiah who would come according to God's promise. Every church member needs a faithfulness that will point others to Jesus Christ. When the church members at Jerusalem proved their faithfulness, "fear came upon every soul" (Acts 2:43). Faithfulness builds a powerful influence for God that others can see.

Revelation 2:13. *Faithfulness* is not denying "the faith" even if it costs a church member his life. Antipas died faithful. *Antipas* means "against all." Antipas was willing to stand against all opposition to be faithful to the faith. *The faith* is the system of teachings of Jesus Christ. Faithful pastors and church members must teach others to "observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Antipas was a "faithful martyr" (Rev. 2:13). The word *martyr* means "witness," but here it means "suffered death" for fidelity to Christ. Pergamos was the center of a form of false, satanic worship. It was popular. Faithfulness to the truth demanded that Antipas "come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not

the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). Antipas refused to accept, tolerate or embrace false doctrine or false worship.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Faithfulness enables a church member to fulfill his role in serving God. God set the example in faithfulness. God is faithful in terms of giving every person the call to salvation. God defined His responsibilities in seeking to save the lost. Titus 2:11 states, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Part of God's faithfulness to call every sinner to repentance and salvation was evidenced in the church at Corinth. First Corinthians 1:9 states, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." God's faithfulness is unquestioned. He is faithful when His children experience temptation. First Corinthians 10:13 states, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." God is faithful to forgive sins when His children seek forgiveness on His terms. First John 1:9 states, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Every church member should strive to follow God's example of faithfulness.

God's faithfulness witnesses that He has never failed any of His children. Thankful church members show their gratefulness to God by their faithfulness.

Church membership is a sacred trust and a solemn responsibility that demands faithfulness. Paul instructed Timothy on the necessity of faithfulness and the sacred trust of church membership. First Timothy 3:15 states, "But if I tarry

long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Faithful church members are found "in the house of God." Faithful church members are dedicated to Bible study to be able to understand and to teach the truth. Second Timothy 2:15 states, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Faithful church members are loyal to the truth. Jude 3 states, "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Faithful church members have the right bearing, manner and actions in worship and before the world. Faithfulness encompasses responsibilities in every part of daily life.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

A church member's faithfulness should include his worship, his prayers, his Bible study, his witnessing, his talents, his efforts in every good work and his giving. Every church member is a steward over his life, health, talents, abilities, income and influence. Too many church members squander the things that God has entrusted to their oversight. Faithfulness in these areas requires the right priority. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Since faithfulness is a matter of putting God first, each church member may examine his own record of faithfulness. Unfaithfulness has broken more marriages, wasted more teaching opportunities in Sunday School, destroyed more Christian influence and discouraged more preachers and church members than anything else.

Faithfulness is the responsibility of every church member. The prevailing attitude toward faithfulness is revealed in the idea that if I miss one service, no one will miss me. Faithfulness matters to God, before whom every child of God will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Faithfulness matters to the husband and father attempting to build a Christian family and raise children who will not depart from the Lord when they are adults. Faithfulness matters to the teenager who watches adult church members to see if they really mean what they say about loving the Lord. Faithfulness matters.

Baptist Heritage and the Word of God

Lesson Text: 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Background Scripture: Psalm 119:11, 17, 18; Isaiah 8:20; Luke 10:26; John 5:39; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will discuss the importance of the Word of God today.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Study the Word, 2 Timothy 2:15.

God's Word is truth. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. God is truth. John 14:6 states, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." God gave the truth to the prophets who spoke and wrote by inspiration of God. Acts 10:43 states, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." The Bible's theme is Jesus Christ the only Savior. God's Word of truth established every right moral principle, doctrine and practice that New Testament churches should follow.

God's Word of truth equips every child of God to obey the Lord. Every workman needs the right tools to enable him to do the job expertly and efficiently. The Bible is the tool with which a child of God needs to be fully equipped to serve the Lord. Someone once said, "The Bible is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, a river of pleasure; is given to us in life; will be open in judgment and remembered forever. It involves the highest responsibility, rewards the greatest labor, and con-

demns all who trifle with it." God's Word of truth satisfies, strengthens and settles any child of God who seeks to be equipped by its words.

God's Word of truth explains God's revelation to mankind. The Bible gives us the plan of salvation, the manner of acceptable worship, the plain doctrines of truth, the principle of separation from false worship, the pattern of New Testament churches, the prophecies of the second coming, the promise of a glorious future and the commission that New Testament churches are to fulfill until Jesus comes. God's Word of truth reveals and explains everything God wants His servants to know.

Those who rightly divide God's Word of truth know the mind of the Lord. In God's Word of truth, children of God have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Children of God find in the Bible words "which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (verse 13). God's Word of truth reveals the mind of Christ.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

2 Timothy 3:15-17. All of God's Word is Scripture. The Bible is the all-

sufficient rule of faith and practice. Outside of the Bible, there is no inspiration, no divine revelation and no communication from God. Since the Bible was completed around AD 100, God has not communicated with mankind other than Holy Spirit conviction. All the miraculous, spiritual gifts ceased at the completion of the Bible (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Any prophecy, special knowledge, speaking in tongues, dreams, visions, conversation with the spirits of the dead or claims to have a divine revelation are bogus. Those who want to know God's divine revelation must turn to the Bible.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The word *inspiration* means "God-breathed." God's Word is completely inspired. Every person who handles the Bible, whether preacher, teachers, students of the Word, translators or commentators, must believe that every word in the Bible is God-breathed for their words or work to have any merit. God did not inspire sentences or paragraphs; He inspired every word from the first word until the last word. Psalm 12:6 states, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." *Pure* means "bright, clear, uncontaminated, innocent and holy." *Purified* means "clarified, extracted, poured down or refined." God's Word contains no errors. God made it plain and clear, extracted His Word from Himself and placed it by inspiration in the minds and hearts of the writers, pouring it down upon them from Heaven. Since God's Word is already refined, man cannot improve upon it. The Bible is inerrant. *Inerrant* means "free from error." It is infallible. *Infallible* means "absolutely reliable." God's Word of truth is as true, right, holy and dependable as its author.

God's Word is profitable for every child of God to know. *Profitable* means "helpful, of service or an advantage."

The Bible explains sound doctrine. Bible doctrine is one unchanging system of divine truth. *Doctrine* is teaching. Jude 3 states, "It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." There can be no new doctrine. The Bible is the basis for reproof. *Reproof* is conviction of a sinner and refutation of error. The Bible gives correction for those who seek to remain in God's will. *Correction* means "to straighten up or to set in proper order." God's Word of truth instructs children of God in the way of righteousness. *Instruction* is education, training or chastisement. *Righteousness* is equity, fairness or rightness in character, attitude and action. God's Word profits every child of God who will avail himself of its advantages.

God's Word of truth fully equips the child of God for fruitful service. Service for the Lord must be done in and through a New Testament church (Eph. 3:21). The Bible explains salvation, scriptural baptism and church membership. God's Word of truth gives the order (Acts 2:41, 42). *Perfect* means "complete, well-rounded or mature." The church member who seeks to be mature and well-rounded in every good work must continue growing in the Word. *Thoroughly furnished* means "finished out, fresh or just completed." God's Word completely equips every diligent Bible student for every work God has commanded. The Bible is the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice that every child of God should follow.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Psalm 119:11, 17, 18. God's Word should be "hid" in one's heart. Scripture memorization provides many blessings to those who learn portions of God's Word. Those who follow the Bible will

strive against sin and avoid the path of temptation. The serious Bible student should pray for God's blessings of health and life to be a better witness by obeying God's Word. Each serious Bible student will pray for understanding before undertaking the study of the Word.

Isaiah 8:20. God's Word cuts a straight line between truth and error. The Bible is absolute truth. There is no vacillation in the Bible. There are no gray areas in the Bible. There is a specific command, a principle of truth or an example to follow that clearly separates right and wrong. Those who preach, teach, witness and speak according to the Bible are following God. Those who do not speak according to the Bible are not.

Luke 10:26. Jesus asked the lawyer these questions: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Some find only what they want to find in the Bible. The lawyers, scribes and Pharisees went to God's Word with a closed mind and found only those things that agreed with their viewpoint. The point is not what one reads in the Bible or what the Bible means to an individual but what God says to anyone who will receive it.

John 5:39. "Search the scriptures." Jesus gave a command to do Bible study. *Search* means "to seek, to inquire or to investigate fully." Many think their own plan of salvation is recorded in the Bible. God's one way of salvation by grace through faith is recorded in the Bible. God's Word gives witness to Jesus Christ in salvation, in all the doctrines, in all the prophecies and in every moral principle.

Hebrews 4:12. The Word of God is a living Word. *Quick* means "alive." *Powerful* means "active, effective and operative." *Sharper* means "keen." The Bible is compared to a sword. It has such a fine edge that a single blow will suffice. With the Bible, repeated hacking is unnecessary. The Bible is not a dead, archaic piece of literature, folk tradition, history

and custom. The Bible cuts to the heart of one's thinking, feelings, attitudes and intentions. It is accompanied by Holy Spirit conviction.

2 Peter 1:20, 21. The words of the Bible did not come by the will of man. God inspired every word. By inspiration, God gave His message of truth to human writers and permitted them to use their own vocabulary. By inspiration, the Holy Spirit so guided and controlled the writers that every word in the Bible is Holy Spirit approved. God's Word of truth is one unit of truth that demands every interpretation agree with all the rest of the Scripture. No one has the right to make the Bible say what he wants it to mean.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

God's inspired Word should be honored and respected. God has preserved His inspired Word. Psalm 12:6, 7 states, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." Even in the face of a multitude of Bible versions, God has preserved His inspired Word.

What makes a Bible version acceptable or unacceptable? The first consideration should be the translator's viewpoint concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures. If the translators take a small view of inspiration, they do not consider every word of the Bible as inspired. They practice "dynamic equivalency," a term that helps the translators feel good about taking sentences or paragraphs from the original and then placing the concept in their own words. This process has resulted in some new versions editing out significant portions of God's Word. One English version reportedly contains about sixty percent of the Bible. The stellar mark of the translators of the

King James Version of the Bible (the translation used for this Through-the-Bible literature) was their high regard for the inspiration of every word of the Bible. Rather than alter God's Word by choosing a wrong word, the translators at times chose to transliterate a word. *Transliteration* means "to represent or spell in the characters of another alphabet." One example is the word *baptize*. The King James Version is still recommended as the most reliable English version.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

The Bible has been preserved by God. It is interesting to note that Paul told Timothy that he had the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:15, 16). Timothy probably had a copy of a copy of a copy. His copy was "the holy scriptures." No one claims Timothy was in possession of any original Bible manuscripts. Timothy's copies of the Word of God had been preserved by God.

No modern translation is inspired. God promised to be with His church as an institution to the end of the church age (Matt. 28:20). God also promised to preserve His children (1 Peter 1:5). This is called eternal security. Therefore, God has the power and ability to preserve His Word. The King James Version of the Bible has been preserved by God for almost four hundred years. It is based on the Received Text, also known as the Textus Receptus. The Baptist heritage reveals the practice of accepting the Textus Receptus as the God-preserved Bible

text. Other English versions use a perverted text. Upon receiving some manuscripts that false religionists had rejected and put in the garbage, other English versions used those rejected manuscripts, filled in the blanks where the manuscripts were incomplete and were translated by the rules of dynamic equivalency. (See *Touch Not The Unclean Thing*, a book concerning the Text Issue and Separation by David Sorenson, published by Northstar Baptist Ministries, Duluth, MN.) These are the popular, modern, English versions. It is obvious that translations from a perverted text by perverted methods are unreliable. The King James Version continues to be the best choice for English-speaking people for God's reliable, divinely preserved Word of truth.

Each person should make the most of his Bible study. Begin prayerfully. Ask God's help to understand it. Proceed thoughtfully. Think about God's meaning. Consider it carefully. God's inspired writers used certain words and not others. Study a passage repeatedly. After several repetitions, the meaning becomes clearer. Read it extensively. Read large portions at one sitting. Read it regularly. Set aside a special time for Bible study. Continue to study the Bible faithfully. If one misses a day, go back to faithful study the next day. Accept what the Bible says and practice it obediently. Do what God says in His book. Study the Bible purposefully. The serious Bible student will grow in the Lord. Study the Bible reverently. The Bible is God's inspired Word.

Baptist Heritage and the Godhead

Lesson Text: Matthew 3:16, 17.

Background Scripture: Acts 17:28-31; Romans 1:20-23; Colossians 2:9-11; 1 John 5:7.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will understand what is meant by the terms *God the Father*, *God the Son* and *God the Holy Spirit*.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

The Mystery of Godliness, 1 Timothy 3:16.

The mystery of godliness includes the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of angels, the doctrine of the virgin birth, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. In fact, the mystery of godliness includes all the doctrines of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). One of the mysteries of the faith is the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Baptist heritage reveals a people who have believed in a Triune God. John the Baptist observed the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus. Every part of God’s work from creation unto the eternal ages to come involves the Godhead working together as one. The doctrine of the Trinity states that God is one God expressed in three equal persons. These three are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each one possesses the nature, character and power of God. The mystery of the Trinity is beyond human comprehension to understand or explain.

The doctrine of the Trinity is both an Old Testament truth and a New Testament truth. Old Testament references hint at the more complete revelation of the doctrine in the New Testament (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 6:3). The Hebrew plural referring to three or more teaches that God is a Trinity (Gen. 1:26).

God the Father planned for God the Son to be manifest in the flesh as the Savior. God the Father was satisfied with the just, holy and righteous sacrifice of the Son. Isaiah 53:11 states, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.” God the Son was justified through the Holy Spirit. *Justified* means “to regard as innocent or righteous.” *In the Spirit* means “through the operation of the Spirit.” God the Holy Spirit approved the sacrifice of God the Son according to the plan of God the Father.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Matthew 3:16, 17. At the baptism of Jesus, the Trinity is taught. God placed such great significance on baptism that each person of the Godhead had a part in

the baptism of Jesus. After examining the significance of scriptural baptism, one may better understand why God placed the mark of the Trinity upon it.

God approved John the Baptist's baptism. Scriptural baptism is the immersion in water of a child of God by the proper authority for the purpose of obedience to God and identification with Jesus Christ. Scriptural baptism is the first command of God that every child of God is to obey after he is saved. Some believe Jesus walked about sixty miles to receive baptism from the only man God authorized to perform baptism. The authority mattered to Jesus Christ. Baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. To fulfill the picture, immersion is required. Jesus is the Son of God, so He did not need to become a child of God to be baptized. Baptism is only for children of God. Jesus explained the right purpose for baptism when He said, "It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

The Bible also teaches that baptism is a personal witness for Christ. It identifies one with the doctrine of the administrator. Romans 6:17 states, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Jesus accepted the teachings of John the Baptist. Baptism also is a testimony of faith that the candidate wants to live a life that reflects Jesus. Romans 6:4 states, "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." God expects the obedient believer to overcome temptation. Romans 6:6 states, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Baptism also affirms one's belief in the resurrection of Jesus

Christ. Romans 6:5 states, "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Scriptural baptism is a powerful witness for Jesus Christ.

God the Father spoke audibly from Heaven. Jesus prayed, "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Jesus taught His church members to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). God the Father is eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and worthy of worship (Psalms 90:1, 2; 139:7, 8). God the Father chose to reveal Himself to His creation through His Son Jesus and through the Bible.

God the Son was immersed in the Jordan River. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. He is called the "Word of God." John 1:1-3 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Jesus Christ is the eternal God and the only source for physical life or spiritual life. John 1:4 states, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." He gave Himself as a sinless, substitutionary sacrifice for every person. God the Son was willing to reveal Himself to the world in a fleshly body through the virgin birth.

God the Holy Spirit lit upon Jesus in the form of a dove. John 4:24 states, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The Holy Spirit is the agent responsible for making the believing, repentant sinner born-again. Romans 8:2 states, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." He reveals Himself to man by His conviction.

Scriptural baptism reflects the doctrine of the Trinity when New Testament churches continue “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Since John the Baptist’s death, Jesus placed the authority for scriptural baptism in His church as an institution. Every time a person is baptized under the scriptural form, everyone present is reminded of the doctrine of the Trinity.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Acts 17:28-31. Paul on Mars’ Hill referred to the Godhead. He gave God the glory for creation and for the power to sustain His creation. He said, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (verse 28). The concept of God is not “like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (verse 29). Paul taught that the concept of God is greater than men can understand. Man is incapable of producing a likeness of God. God the Father is the first person in the Godhead. Jesus is the One the Father has chosen to “judge the world in righteousness” (verse 31). Jesus, God’s Son, is the second person of the Godhead. Paul preached Jesus. God the Holy Spirit “now commandeth all men every where to repent” (verse 30). Holy Spirit conviction makes men know they need to repent. In Paul’s preaching and teaching, the Godhead consisted of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Romans 1:20-23. Although God is invisible, He revealed Himself to mankind through His creation. Mankind may recognize the Trinity of the Godhead. God the Father determined that every person would have the opportunity to be saved (Titus 2:11). God the Son made salvation possible by His death on Calvary. God the Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers of their need to be saved.

Faced with the indisputable proof that the creation was designed by God, one must conclude that God is righteous, just, holy, eternal, all-powerful and that every person is “without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God” (Rom. 1:20, 21). When any person rejects God, that person is doomed to eternity in hell if he dies in that condition.

Colossians 2:9-11. Jesus Christ is fully God. He has all power. Jesus was no less God during His earthly life and ministry than He was at the point of creation, at His resurrection or at His ascension. John 1:14 states, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” The apostle John agreed with the apostle Paul that Jesus deserves all the glory man can give Him. There is no truth outside of Jesus Christ. There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 states, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Jesus Christ is the only means by which any person can put off the “sins of the flesh” (Col. 2:11).

1 John 5:7. “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” The Word is Jesus Christ. Holy Ghost is a synonym of Holy Spirit. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are equal. They are one. James 2:19 states, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” Satan trembles because the power of God is greater than any other power, including his. First John 4:4 states, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” Jesus bore witness of the Father, the Father bore wit-

ness of the Son and the Holy Spirit bore witness to the Son. The Trinity of the Godhead thinks, acts and works as one.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Many religious people deny the doctrine of the Trinity. They speak of Jesus only. Their form for baptism includes simply "in Jesus' name." Their wedding vows are not made in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It would be inconsistent to believe in the doctrine of the Trinity and participate in ecumenical worship with those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Amos 3:3 states, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The principle of separation demands that those who hold to sound doctrine do not participate in ecumenical worship. Ecumenical worship is the idea of people of different denominations coming together to worship. Second Corinthians 6:16, 17 states, "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." *Idols* is idol temples, a reference to false religion. Baptists have ever held to the Bible doctrine of the Trinity. Baptists should not compromise any doctrine of truth.

The doctrine of the Trinity may be experienced through prayer. Jesus taught prayer should be addressed to the heavenly Father (Matt. 6:9) in Jesus' name. Access to God the Father comes only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:26 states, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we

know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Prayer is effective because the Godhead works together as one to hear and answer prayer.

The doctrine of the Trinity also enables the believer to understand the Bible, God's Word. The Bible's main message is Jesus Christ. One should give prayerful consideration to God's message. Look for anything in the passage about Jesus. Those who rightly divide the Word of God come to the point of correct understanding by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Some modern English Bible translations attempt to deny the doctrine of the Trinity. Compare modern English translations. If a Bible translation does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity in one passage where it should, how reliable can it be? On the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, one may question the accuracy of many modern translations. There are two verses to check concerning other doctrines. If the translation omits the profession of faith before baptism, it is unreliable (Acts 8:37). Is the profession of faith in the main text of the translation or has it been footnoted? If the translation refers to salvation as a process, it is unreliable (1 Cor. 1:18). How can church members in a succession of true Baptists who have ever held a belief in the Trinity of the Godhead, a profession of faith before baptism and that salvation is an experience, not a process, accept Bible translations that deny these Bible doctrines?

Baptist Heritage and the Second Coming

Lesson Text: Acts 1:9-11.

Background Scripture: Matthew 26:64; Mark 13:26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 1 John 2:28; Revelation 1:7.

Aim: By the conclusion of this lesson the students will explain what they have learned concerning the second coming of Christ.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

I Will Come Again, John 14:1-3.

The greatest assurance any saved person has is that Jesus will come again. Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled" (verse 1). Children of God do not have to worry about the future. Their future is secure in Christ. Jesus said, "I will come again" (verse 3). At the time of His coming in the air, Jesus will receive His children unto Himself. First Corinthians 15:23 states, "But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." There is coming a day when Jesus will call forth all who are in Christ. Anticipating that occasion in his own lifetime, the apostle John prayed, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). The last prayer of the Bible is a prayer for Jesus' soon return. Are you praying for His return?

Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2). There is a dwelling place or eternal abode in Heaven for every child of God. Jesus spoke of the already completed arrangements for children of God. This passage makes a difference between those who are in the

family of God and those believers who have received scriptural baptism and are members of New Testament churches in good standing. Jesus went to prepare a special place for His bride. The residence of the Bride of Christ will be a specially prepared place. Revelation 21:2 states, "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Jesus spoke to the church He organized during His personal ministry when He said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). The Bride of Christ will dwell in the New Jerusalem. All the other saved people may come in and out, but they will not dwell there. (See Revelation 21:24.) Jesus left this earth to make a special dwelling place for His bride. When all things are ready, He will return.

After Jesus' return in the air, He promised, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Eternity looks grand when one considers being with Christ forever.

EXAMINING THE TEXT

Acts 1:9-11. The crucified, buried and risen Lord ascended to Heaven

about forty days after His resurrection. He proved Himself alive by many witnesses (1 Cor. 15:5-9). More than five hundred witnesses could testify to the truth of the resurrection of Christ. His church followed Him out to the Mount of Olives. Jesus came to earth in a supernatural manner by the virgin birth. He left the earth in a supernatural manner. While they watched Him, "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Two angels appeared with the comforting promise that Jesus would come again. The angels said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (verse 11).

When Jesus comes, He will come in like manner. *Like manner* means "method, style or character." Like manner rules out anything else or any other being considered as His return. Some falsely believe that miraculous spiritual gifts will continue until Jesus returns. They misinterpret the Scripture. First Corinthians 13:10 states, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." They err believing this Scripture refers to the second coming of Christ, but it refers to the completion of the Bible. When Jesus came to earth, He did not come in part. *In part* refers to a section, a share, a division or a portion. When Jesus came, He was fully and completely God. Colossians 2:9 states, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus did not come in part and He did not go in part. His return must be personal, visible and bodily to be in like manner. Jesus will come again. *Come* means "appear." When Jesus comes, He will be the same Jesus who went away.

Jesus will come personally. The Bible states, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven" (1 Thess. 4:16). When Jesus comes, the saved will "meet the

Lord in the air" (verse 17). Jesus said, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). (See also Revelation 22:20.) The Lord's emphasis on His coming is that He will come personally.

Jesus will come bodily. After His resurrection, Jesus said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side" (John 20:27). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus touched Jesus' hand. Luke 24:30, 31 states, "And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight." In His resurrected body, Jesus could appear and disappear at will. John 20:19 states, "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." His resurrected body was not limited to time or space, but it definitely was a body in which He walked and talked. When Jesus comes again in His resurrected body, we also will have a resurrected body like His.

Jesus will come visibly. First John 3:2 states, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." When Jesus comes in the air, every child of God will see Him. This is called the rapture. When He comes back to the earth, all men will see Him (Rev. 1:7). This is the revelation. The second coming of the Lord Jesus will be in two parts, the rapture and the revelation. In both parts, Jesus will come visibly.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:64. When asked if He was the Son of God, Jesus replied, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." The term *Son of man* is used frequently in all four gospels. It refers to Jesus Christ, the Son of God in the flesh. Jesus stated that His rightful place was the seat of power. He is presently at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is the all-powerful God. He also is the God who is coming again in the clouds. He went away by the cloud route. He is coming again by the cloud route. Matthew 24:30 states, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." This is Jesus' coming back to earth.

Mark 13:26-36. Jesus is coming back to the earth. *His elect* refers to the Jews who have been dispersed since the destruction of Jerusalem. The parable of the fig tree places attention on the nation of Israel. The fig tree represents Israel. When the nation of Israel begins to blossom again, the coming of the Lord to earth is near. Even though one may realize the coming of the Lord is near, "of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (verse 32). God's warning to all who believe the coming of the Lord is near is to watch and pray. Luke 21:28 states, "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

1 Corinthians 1:7. Paul urged the church members at Corinth to wait for the Lord's coming. *Waiting* means "to expect fully or to look for something that is near." Jesus described waiting for His return in terms of occupying. He said,

"Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). *Occupy* means "to busy oneself with, to work or to do business." Jesus expects His servants in New Testament churches to be busy doing the Father's business until He comes. That business is specified in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:19, 20 states, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

1 Thessalonians 2:19. Paul wrote of the rapture to the church at Thessalonica. He knew those who were saved would be in Christ's presence when He came. If all the church members at Thessalonica were saved, they would all be with Him at the rapture. Paul referred to a time of great rejoicing when the missionary, soul-winner, preacher, teacher, encourager and youth worker of the Lord's churches will have a great reunion with the Lord, along with those whom they have led to Christ. It was Paul's hope, assurance and confident expectation to be with Christ and those in Christ at the rapture.

1 John 2:28. John expected the Lord to appear at any time. Therefore, he commanded them to "abide in him." *Abide* means "to continue, to stand and to endure." John had no doubts about the Lord's coming. He said, "When he shall appear." John viewed the Lord's return as an imminent event. When Jesus comes, some will be glad and some will be ashamed. Those who will be glad at His return will hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). Those who are ashamed will

have their works burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

Revelation 1:7. John spoke of the revelation, the time when Christ returns to earth. Christ will come in such a manner so that “every eye shall see him.” “They also which pierced him” refers to the Jews. Jesus “came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). When He returns to earth, Israel will no longer be unbelieving. They will rejoice to see Him. All the unbelievers on the earth at the time of His return to earth will mourn. Revelation 22:10, 11 states, “The time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

Baptists have ever held to the premillennial position concerning the return of Christ. Premillennialists believe Christ will come back to earth before the one thousand year reign. One future event in God’s plan includes the seventieth week of Daniel, which is the seven years of the Tribulation Period. Baptists have differing opinions concerning the time of the rapture. Some believe in a pretribulation rapture, which is this writer’s position. Some believe in a midtribulation rapture. Others have lately begun to accept the new pre-wrath rapture position, which is at a later point than the midtribulation rapture. What Baptists believe about the time of the rapture has never been a test of fellowship.

The Baptist heritage concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus rests on the doctrine of His imminent return. *Imminent* means “immediate or at any moment.” There is no prophecy yet to be fulfilled before Christ could return. The apostle Paul and the apostle John both believed the Lord could come back in

their lifetimes (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 John 2:28). The apostle John prayed for His return while on Patmos. Revelation 22:20 states, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Church members should be praying for and looking for the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The coming of the Lord will be in two parts. When Jesus comes in the rapture, He will gather all the saved to meet Him in the air. At that time, the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur. When Jesus returns to the earth, His appearance will be in time to save the nation of Israel from being erased from the face of the earth. Christ will win the Battle of Armageddon. He will reign for one thousand years upon the earth. There will be one final rebellion called Gog and Magog. Before the battle can commence, Jesus will consume the enemy. Following the Battle of Gog and Magog, Jesus will judge the unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment. At that time, the earth will burn, melt and dissolve. After the unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire for eternal torment, Jesus will create a new Heaven and new earth. Throughout the Heaven ages to come, Jesus will reign eternally as Lord of lords and King of kings.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

Bible prophecy and particularly the prophecy of the second coming of Christ have many applications. Bible prophecy comforts and calms God’s people living in the troubled times of the last days. Bible prophecy brings Holy Spirit conviction. Preaching the Lord’s soon return causes children of God to consider their need to be revived and draw ever closer to the Lord. Second Peter 3:14 states, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may

be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Preaching the Lord's soon return reminds unbelievers that they will answer to the all-powerful God. It could be sooner than they expect. Bible prophecy has a compelling sense of urgency that encourages church members to be faithful witnesses, to support missions and to stand firm on the doctrines of Bible truth. Bible prophecy also gives necessary information about God's plan for the future for the saved, the church members who will be in the Bride of Christ, this world, the unsaved, the nations and the devil.

Serious Bible students should be careful to follow the same rules of interpretation used in rightly dividing and correctly understanding the rest of the Scripture. These rules of interpretation help one understand the Scripture correctly. Who is speaking? To whom are they speaking? What was the occasion of the writing? What was the subject under consideration? There are many unusual beliefs based on misinterpretations of the Scripture concerning Bible prophecy. Until Jesus comes, be faithful, be busy working for the Lord, be watching and be praying.