

It Is Written

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WHAT PETER DID NOT SAY

By Bobby Witherington

Because of the “great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem,” the saints, with the exception of the apostles, were “scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). One of those “scattered abroad” was a man named Philip, who “went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). As a result of his preaching, many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized, including a sorcerer named Simon (cf. Acts 8:12,13).

During that period of time (while the apostles were yet alive) miraculous or “spiritual gifts” were frequently imparted to different ones through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (cf. Acts 6:6; 8:17,18; 19:1-6; 2 Tim. 1:6). In the absence of the completed revelation of God these “gifts” were needful so that the church might be properly edified (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12,26-31). Thus, upon learning of the conversion of the Samaritans, the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria, and they prayed for the new converts and laid their hands on them, at which time they “received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14-17). Simon, who before his conversion had bewitched the people with sorceries, could see that what was imparted through the “laying on of the apostles’ hands” was REAL; there was no trickery or fakery to what THEY were doing! He wanted this “power,” and even “offered...money” to buy “this power.” Some things have never been for sale, and this was one of them, so Peter wasted no time setting Simon straight.

To make a long story short, we simply say that Simon, a child of God, sinned when he tried to buy “the gift of God...with money.” His whole procedure reflected a heart that was “not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21). Peter, therefore, had an obligation to reprove Simon and urge that he make proper correction. What then did Peter say to Simon?

Peter did NOT say: “Now Simon, it’s true that you’ve sinned, but don’t worry about it, for you are a child of God, saved by grace, and once you’re in grace you can never fall.”

NOR did Peter say: “Simon, since you are a child of God, and inasmuch as you sinned in ignorance, you need not worry over much – for you see, in your case, the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ is credited to your account, sufficing as it were for your imperfect obedience.”

NOR did Peter say: “Simon, since you have become a Christian and have already sinned, it’s time you learned the difference between the ‘gospel’ and the ‘doctrine’ – the gospel is what you obeyed in order to BECOME a Christian, and the doctrine is what you obey AFTER you become a Christian, so since you just violated the ‘doctrine,’ there is no need to get too uptight over that.”

Well, what DID Peter say to Simon? He said: “Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:20-23).

When all is said and done it still behooves us to get back to the actual TEXT of the Bible. Calvinists will SAY that a child of God cannot fall from grace, and therefore does not HAVE to make any correction for the sins he commits as a Christian – that he will go to heaven anyway. Too soft brethren, especially those whose faith has been destroyed in infidel theological seminaries, and who have a passion for ecumenism, will SAY that the perfect obedience of Christ atones for a Christian’s ignorant disobedience. But the real question is, “What does the BIBLE say?”

In view of the fact that all of us are going to be judged by the divine standard of God's word (cf. John 12:48), dare any of us set it aside for the puny sayings of man?

Placing Membership

by Lee Moses

Sometimes questions arise as to whether it is scripturally necessary, or even scripturally permissible, to "place membership" with a congregation. A modern brother or sister may raise the objection: "I'm a member of the church of Christ, and that's good enough for me." What this person means is: "I am a member of the universal church of Christ, but I have no interest in serving in a local congregation." Others seem to believe that placing membership is a denominational concept, rather than a Scriptural concept. However, the term simply means to identify oneself with a local congregation.

Please consider a few reasons why it is both Scripturally permissible and Scripturally necessary to place membership with a faithful church of Christ after leaving another.

Each Christian Is a Member of a Congregation

In the New Testament, each first-century Christian is understood to be a member of a particular congregation. The New Testament does speak of the universal church of Christ, into which the Lord adds the saved when they are baptized (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). However, far and away, the New Testament most often uses "church" to refer to the local congregation (Acts 14:27; 20:17; Romans 16:1, 23).

Paul wrote to the "saints which are at Ephesus" (Ephesians 1:1). Here it is expressed that he wrote to "saints," or Christians – but were they not saints who were members of the local church at Ephesus? He wrote "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Corinthians 1:2). "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 1:1). Whether Paul addressed "the saints at [whatever location]" or "the church at [whatever location]," he was addressing the same group.

Each Christian Is to Function in the Church

Members are responsible to function within the body (Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:16), and the body functions within each local congregation. There is no larger organizational structure of the church (compare with Philippians 1:1). If we do not function within a local church, we do not function within the church at all.

Each Christian Is to Submit to the Elders

Christians have the responsibility to submit to local leadership, while each eldership has the responsibility to oversee the flock they are among (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2). If one never submits to an eldership, he never complies with his responsibility to submit to an eldership, and he hinders elders from performing their responsibility to oversee the flock.

Each Christian Identified with a Local Congregation

After Saul was converted and returned to Jerusalem, he knew he had to identify himself with the congregation there. This is why "he assayed to join himself to the disciples" there (Acts 9:26). There is no difference between this and what is sometimes called "placing membership." If Saul saw the need to identify himself with a faithful congregation where he was living, why would we not have the same need? If one lives in an area where there are no faithful congregations, placing membership is obviously not an option. In such instances, one should again do what the first century Christians did, and establish congregations in those areas (compare with Acts 8:4ff; 11:19-21). Otherwise, placing membership is both scripturally permissible and scripturally necessary.