

An Escape From Suicide & Sin in One Night (2)

David Halbrook

Last week, we studied from Acts 16, noticing that when the jailer knew he was lost and was taught to believe in Jesus, he was immediately baptized. Why be immediately baptized?

Peter preached repentance and baptism for the remission of sins and baptism saves (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). Paul was baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Jesus said, He who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mk. 16:16). This baptism is part of the word of the Lord Paul taught the jailer (vs. 33). Now we realize that he was immediately baptized so his sins would be immediately forgiven by God!

Today, most people are not immediately baptized because they believe God gives salvation before and without baptism. Baptism for someone who was already saved by Jesus is absent from the book of Acts. The Bible says Jesus' blood was given for the remission of sins and baptism is for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28; Acts 2:38). Baptism is the time when Jesus' blood removes our sin—this is God's purpose and plan. If you were not taught this baptism, contact us for further study or with any related question. We invite any comments or questions.

Editor's Note: This, and last, week's article is also on our website. If you give this week's article in *Arkansas Weekly* to someone, tell them to visit our website to read "Part 1." Every day and week we are paying for these things—let's work every day and week to use them according to our ability, as we live and work among people who are lost without the gospel of Christ.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Please check the lists of various assignments and work needing volunteers on the bulletin board at the back.

Pray for: Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, our brethren who are travelling, and new Christians among us.

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

Church of Christ--Quail Valley

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The Bible Teaches Individual Responsibility (1)

David Halbrook

Beside the Constitution, the founders of the United States of America also agreed upon a "Bill of Rights," which implies that the government cannot do everything that the individual citizen can do and that the differences between individual action and collective action (through the government) must be recognized and respected. This distinction is a sound concept, defined by God and even applied to the individual Christian and the church (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:16). Because Christians ought to be familiar with this principle, they ought to be able to recognize when that distinction is being blurred, undermined, or destroyed in the church or society.

Many Christians and citizens believe that individual responsibility is not being promoted and respected as it ought by our government (not limited to any single administration or political party). This is no surprise when our leaders mock and misrepresent the Bible. President Barak Obama once mocked the idea that the Bible has a definitive use in forming public policy, asking "Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount, a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own defense department would survive its application? [*Laughter and applause from crowd*] So before we get carried away, let's read our Bibles now. Folks haven't been reading their Bibles."¹ By reading his Bible, he could have directed the defense department to Romans 13 and Proverbs 14:34; 20:26 because Matthew 5 is a text focused on individual relationships and decisions, not civil law or military policy. Whether or not political leaders help us to recognize passages of individual emphasis, we must learn what God expects of us. As you read, ask yourself whether our government is encouraging or discouraging the thinking and practice God expects of all individuals.

¹ http://usliberals.about.com/od/faithinpubliclife/a/ObamaReligion_3.htm accessed 5-18-14

God expects individuals to identify and choose between “wants” and “needs” In the sermon of Jesus in Matthew 5-7, Jesus was revealing God’s plan for the lives of all individuals, not God’s plan for the civil policy of government. Jesus began by teaching men the necessity of having a poor, penitent, meek, truth-seeking, merciful, pure, peace-making, and dedicated heart (Matt. 5:1-12). Human government can never make such things conditions of citizenship or assistance, but Jesus demands that every member of His kingdom view and aptly adjust the condition of their heart in order to receive His aid. Jesus also teaches that He governs not only the outward action but also the inward decision (Matt. 5:20-6:16). Jesus expects His citizens to view inward self-control as more than a lofty, long-term goal but as an urgent need. The rewards and punishments (hell, forgiveness, open reward from the Father) promised for man’s response to these teachings are beyond the scope of what a government can offer to compliant or needy citizens.

In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus teaches men to rely on God and seek His kingdom in order to find happiness. Physical prosperity, as an individual or a nation, is of minor concern to Jesus or people with this focus because all such things can be lost. Instead of waiting for a czar, secretary, president, senator, or dictator to solve my financial problem or guarantee payment for my medical needs so that I can feel content today and confident about a happy future, Jesus directs us to get our priorities straight. If my happiness is dependent on health, food, clothes, and shelter, my happiness and hope can be lost at any moment of any day (Job 1:13-19; 2:7-9). True happiness, along with every physical need, is found by seeking and loving God. Waiting for or looking to any other master (my government or myself) to bring me happiness will only lead to sin and disappointment. Jesus urges us to recognize that we need enduring spiritual gifts available only in His kingdom and accept that all physical things are temporary. With this mindset, it becomes simple for every person to distinguish between “wants” and “needs.” *(article will be continued next week)*

An Oft Overlooked Beatitude

David Halbrook

“Beatitude” is defined as “supreme blessedness or happiness” (American Heritage Dictionary). We are most familiar with the beatitudes of Psalm 1:1 and Matthew 5:1-11, but Luke 7:23 records another beatitude, “blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” If the truth becomes offensive to us or “rubs us the wrong way,” then Jesus has said that we cannot receive the blessings, joy, and happiness that comes from Him.

That's significant because we live in a culture in which people, sometimes even Christians, have a different idea about how joy and happiness will come. They often believe that avoiding “doctrinal issues” which offend people will lead both them and us to happier lives. However, Jesus did not recommend removing that which was offensive in order to produce happiness. Instead, He warned that genuine joy is simply not available to those who are offended by His word. Thus, any joy that is felt as a result of removing the source of offense is merely a shallow, passing euphoria and is not of God.

Lest we have a skewed sense of what Jesus is saying, realize that Jesus did not say that He received joy from offending people and neither should we. Jesus' taught with the desire that the hearers would come, take His yoke, and find rest (Matt. 11:28-30). When they refused, Jesus was not sympathetic to their rebellious spirit, but He was touched by the knowledge of their pending destruction (Mt. 23:37).

Jesus was saddened but not shocked by those who took offense to His message, and He tried to help the disciples (and us) prepare for this response. In Matthew 15, after Jesus sharply rebuked the religious leaders of that time “His disciples came and said to Him, 'Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?'" Somehow they could tell that the religious leaders were not made to rejoice by the message of the Messiah. “But He answered and said, 'Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.'” (vss 12-14). Only recently have I grasped what Jesus meant by “let them alone. . .” He clearly did not mean “don't talk to them anymore, its just a waste of time” because Jesus Himself continued to deal with these same people. Jesus was telling the disciples to be less concerned with some being offended and be more concerned with the ditch where these and their followers were headed.

Instead of dwelling on how to make the message less offensive, we should focus on the tragedy of eternal damnation that is coming to those who reject the rule of Christ. Our focus should be on how we can influence them to make them more receptive to the truth rather than thinking of how we can rework the truth to make it more palatable. When men turn from their poor attitude toward God's word (which causes them to be offended), they then make themselves available to receive the greatest and most enduring joys of life. Truly “blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”