

Unbelievable, Part 1 – Unmistakable

Earlier this month Pope Benedict XVI – one of the most revered religious leaders on the planet – released a shocking statement on “Catholic identity.” In clear, non-negotiable and jaw-dropping terms, the pontiff stated that (1) only Catholics are true Christians; (2) other Christian denominations are “not true churches”; and (3) all non-Catholics lack the “means of salvation.” Most Protestants – and many Catholics – probably just rolled their eyes when they heard about the pope’s announcement, which quickly got buried among other more pressing news items.

However, there is a serious undertone here in this age of ecumenicalism, for what the pontiff declared on July 10, 2007 has actually been the official position of the Catholic Church for many centuries. And that has not changed one bit in the almost 500 years since Martin Luther first nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany and ignited the Protestant Reformation. It has not changed despite the hundreds of denominations that have sprung up around various interpretations of Bible doctrines. And it has not changed in spite of all the talk of Christian unity that we hear around us.

With all respect to our dear Catholic friends, I totally disagree with the Pope when he declares that HE is the head of the only true church. However, I totally agree with him when he states that “Christ established here on earth only one church.” But to any sensible God-fearing person, that begs the question “**Which church is the right church?**” Christians may be afraid to ask that question for fear of offending their friends who attend a different congregation. But be assured that unsaved people ask it every day – they are at least honest enough to realize that all these contradicting beliefs cannot all be right!

Luke 16:8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

We live in a very SUBJECTIVE world, where people tend to base everything on how they “feel” – everyone is an authority unto themselves! But it is absolutely crucial not to base our eternal salvation on “feeling.” (When boarding an airplane, we want more than a “feeling” that it will fly – we want to be sure that the pilot, the air traffic controllers, the mechanics, etc. are “doing it by the book!”) Salvation is the same – we must know God’s Word, and evaluate our spiritual experience by that!

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THIS? “I don’t see it like you do, but my interpretation is as valid as yours. Let’s just agree to disagree.” ??? That’s not how the Apostles and the early church felt about it!

2 Peter 1:20-21 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

John lived the longest among the twelve apostles, and saw the ebb and flow of the New Testament church to the end of the first century. Along with the great revival, he also saw some doctrinal errors that began to creep into the church. One such group that John wrote against was the Gnostics. The word Gnostic comes from the Greek word for “knowledge” (“gnosis”). This group claimed extra-Biblical revelation, and were fascinated with the unseen spirit world, hierarchies of angels, etc. You were not “spiritual” unless you bought into their so-called secret knowledge, mappings of the world of principalities and powers, etc. Paul warned the Colossians against such “knowledge” ...

Colossians 2:18 (CEV) Don’t be cheated by people who make a show of acting humble and who worship angels. They brag about seeing visions. But it is all nonsense, because their minds are filled with selfish desires.

The Gnostics looked down on the Apostles and Bible-based Christians, priding themselves on their “secret knowledge” of the “deeper things of the Spirit.” Gnosticism led people beyond the sure foundation of Scripture into the orbit of persuasive personalities and subjective experiences. Apostolic worship is emotional, to be sure, but also involves the mind, the will ... and the WORD! Our openness to experience can also make us prey to novelty. We MUST be Bible-based people!

John uses several “plays on words” in his epistles to illustrate his point that REAL SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE always involves obeying the Word of God:

1 John 2:3-5 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

1 John 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

Simply put, there is something we can do so we can KNOW that we are saved and that is KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE WORD OF GOD. Also, there is something God will do so we can KNOW that we are saved and that is FILLING US WITH HIS SPIRIT.

Here's one thing I have no trouble knowing for sure – I'm not perfect!
And the Word of God agrees with me!

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

1 Kings 8:46 (NKJV) There is no one who does not sin.

We only have two choices regarding sin – we can wait until after death and hope for the best, or we can deal with our sin now. NOT DECIDING IS DECIDING, because when eternity is at stake tomorrow may be too late.

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

1 John 1:8-10 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The question is HOW DO I DEAL WITH MY SINS NOW? John told us that we need to keep the commandments of God and let God fill us with His Spirit. WHAT ARE GOD'S COMMANDS REGARDING SALVATION?

COMMAND #1 – REPENT!

Luke 13:3 (NKJV) Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.

Acts 17:30 (NIV) In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Repentance is a decision to serve God that causes us to live differently.

Proverbs 28:13 (NKJV) He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

After I repent, I am forgiven and allowed to go on to the next step ...

COMMAND #2 – BE BAPTIZED IN JESUS' NAME!

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Believing is a beginning point – nothing more! Did you know that the difference between believers and unbelievers is ACTION! (i.e. warning given in burning building)

FOUR COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING BAPTISM:

If I was baptized by a church, then I'm baptized. WRONG! The Bible teaches people to be re-baptized if they have never been baptized in Jesus' name. (Acts 19:3-5)

Acts 19:3-5 (NKJV) And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I was baptized as an infant, so I'm baptized. WRONG! Sprinkling water on babies (or adults!) is not the way baptism was done in the Bible for two reasons: (a) "baptizo" means to immerse in water which is the best portrayal of a burial, (b) babies can't repent, so they are not allowed to get baptized!

I was baptized in the titles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, so I'm baptized. WRONG! The only Biblical form of baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

This is Matthew's account of the last command Jesus gave His disciples before He ascended into Heaven, written in AD 62 – AFTER THE CHURCH HAS BEEN BAPTIZING "IN JESUS' NAME" FOR THIRTY YEARS! Matthew is writing to the Jews, teaching them some theology – that Jesus is the Father who created the world, the Son who walked among humans for thirty-three years, and the Holy Spirit that now dwells in the church. Titles are not names – there is only one name in Matthew 28:19! Furthermore, no one is being baptized here – Jesus expects His disciples to FULFILL His command, not just REPEAT it! And that's exactly what the disciples do!

Acts 2:38 – be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ

Acts 8:16 – they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus

Acts 19:5 – they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus

Acts 4:12 – For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Colossians 3:17 (NKJV) – And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The most common misconception is this: Baptism is for church membership. WRONG! Baptism is for the removal (remission) of sin.

Acts 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Colossians 2:12 (NLT) For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

Romans 6:4-5 (CEV) When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Christ. We were baptized, so that we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father. If we shared in Jesus' death by being baptized, we will be raised to life with him.

Galatians 3:27 (CEV) And when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes.

Acts 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

There's no such thing in the Bible as a Christian who is not baptized in Jesus' name!

Obedying the commandments of God to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name is our part in KNOWING we are saved, and that qualifies us for God to do His part – filling us with His Spirit!

Remember the people from Ephesus who were obedient to God's Word and were re-baptized in Jesus' name? Do you know what God did for them?

Acts 19:5-6 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.

When you do your part, God will do His part ... and you can KNOW that you are saved! IT WILL BE UNMISTAKABLE!

1 John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (YOUR PART)

1 John 4:13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. (GOD'S PART)