

## Some Thoughts To Church Membership

It is a marvel that people can join the church of Jesus Christ and then leave it. There are many reasons for leaving a church and unfortunately not many give scriptural reasons. There are some areas for serious consideration of those who leave the church and of those who help converts into the church:

1. the understanding of salvation of the individual,
2. whether the individual is saved by the grace of God, and
3. careful examination of the candidate by godly leaders to ensure the gate to membership is kept carefully.

***Brother Charles Spurgeon highlights the danger of easily admitting an individual into the Lord's local church to the individual because it may lull the individual into a false security of salvation that will send that individual to hell.***

The approach to this question in my mind is 2-fold:

1. the theological truth and
2. the practical expression within the local church on how we should express the truth.

1. **THE THEOLOGICAL TRUTH** - When a person is saved, the next step he should ensure in his response to Faith in Christ, is baptism. Baptism should be mentioned along with the presentation of the gospel, not that it saves but that it is a fruit of that knowledge and receiving of salvation by faith. Some may debate then that the person may confuse salvation and baptism - but was it not demonstrated by Philip with the Eunuch Acts 8? If you read Isaiah 53, there was no mention of baptism and deducing from Scripture, it must have been mentioned in their course of conversation which was why the Eunuch asked – “what does hinder me to be baptise?”

When an individual repents of his sin and professes faith in Christ, which is the basis of biblical salvation (Acts 20:21), there is no reason to object or stop an individual from following the Lord in believers' baptism, which is the Christian's obedience to Christ. This is given in the Great Commission - Matt 28:19 - 20, Teach all nations, baptise them and then teach (disciple) them. This was preached strongly by Peter on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2, we see how the people trusted Christ, were baptised and joined the church and that reflected what happened on that day of Pentecost. They heard, they were

convicted and they trusted Christ, confessing their sins. When Peter said - repent and be **baptised**, Acts 2:38 - it was significant for it was spiritual suicide and many times physical suicide for a known Jew (remember they came for the feast of Pentecost) to embrace Christ and to renounce Judaism *John 9:22 These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.*)

## **TO BE BAPTISED IS THE FRUIT OF THEIR REPENTANCE**

On that day of Pentecost because if they do accept Christ and publicly demonstrated their faith, they have signed the death warrant. The persecution firstly with the Jews and the religious leaders and then the Roman empire was set against the Christians.

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

I sincerely believe today that baptism should be a fruit of repentance as the individual turns to Christ in humble submission to His purpose and His will.

Is it possible that the early church baptised people who were not believers? One possible example was Simon the Sorcerer. *(Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.)* Many believe he is not saved. Is it therefore the error of Philip? Or the people at the church in Samaria?

Moving on from this to the

**2. PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF TRUTH.** I would assume that it was Philip who baptised after his evangelistic campaigns and Simon was one of them. It is dangerous to speculate what transpired but suffice it to say, the true colours revealed itself when he saw the apostles giving the Holy Ghost and Simon wanted that kind of power. Of course, the apostle identified and rebuked Simon later. Philip did what anyone would do – when there is a revival among the Samaritans, he can only judge by their confession and as a result administered baptism to those who came including Simon.

Today, our culture is different, our people and their thinking are different. There have been a range of responses to this situation – accept them on face and verbal value – “I believed in Christ and of course I have demonstrated some level of faithfulness in my christian life” and therefore we say “yes you can be baptised.” Another may say “I believe in Christ” but the church leaders say – “Let us monitor your progress for the next 6 months or so and see if there is any fruit for repentance.” To do the first, would be the simple straightforward approach and this reflects the teaching of Scripture. To do the second require more effort and may result in more arbitrary judgment because

- \* what kind of fruit are looking for?

- \* how much of the fruit does one want to see before we admit the individual?

- \* Does that mean a young believer cannot be baptised once he is saved by the next month?

This is a difficult question which was why it was stated from the start that it was a tough stance but an essential truth. Spurgeon is an immensely practical man – his conclusions often stem from rich biblical insight and keen observation of the situations happening in churches and christianity. When he made that statement, he was merely telling church leaders and christians in general to ensure that there is the fruit of repentance before admitting someone into the church otherwise one may lull the person into a false security that he is safe and as a result, damn the person to a lake of fire. As a local church, there is a need to come to a settled conclusion, what are the steps we will take, why, and then explain it to the local church, and we should and must be collectively be of one mind about what we need to do about a candidate for baptism.

In the book “The Wonders of Grace”, a book on the testimonies of converted sinners who sought baptism and church membership in Metropolitan Tabernacle, the church that was pastored by Pastor Charles Spurgeon, there was a very deliberate process that we may emulate.

Before a convert who seeks church membership through baptism into the local church, the church elders were the ones who will meet and hear the testimonies of the converted. The elders were careful to seek the Lord for wisdom and discernment to ascertain the seekers’ conversion and what is the necessary help needed to help those who are seeking baptism and church membership to know the doctrine of grace and by faith accept the Lord Jesus.

## ***The Process of church membership:***

1. The seeker will share his conversion testimony to the elders and they will record down the testimony.
2. In the testimony, they look for four clear areas in the seeker's testimonies:
  - A tenderness of conscience
  - Attachment to the means of grace
  - Desire to come out of the world
  - Deep interest in the unsaved (page 9)
3. When the areas are found in the seeker's testimony, the seeker will be given an appointment to see Pastor Spurgeon.
4. At the appointment, Pastor Spurgeon will appoint one of the elders to visit the seeker to see, and ensure that the life of the seeker is consistent with the principles of Holiness and the Scripture. Some of the practical evidences are:
  - a. Faithful attendance at the church at appointed times *"Attendance at as many meetings as possible on Sundays and during the week was seen as a sign of true Christian life. Many were in service and had very little free time away from their work , but their new Christian instinct should be seen – to assemble together whenever possible"*
  - b. Evangelistic Zeal and outreach
  - c. Forsaking of the world
  - d. Keeping of the Lords' day, and dedicating it for the Lord
  - e. Attendance at prayer meetings to which Spurgeon calls the *"the most important meeting of the week."*
5. When these are present, the individual would then be presented for church membership and baptism.

Is this possible in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century church? This pastor believes that it is as we seek:

- the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our local church
- clear practice of separation by those in spiritual leadership
- clear practice of faithfulness by those in church
- clear zeal of evangelism in each member
- love of prayer and the word of God in every member.

May the Lord build a church that will reflect His Holiness, Love and give Him all glory in Singapore!

