

THOUGHTS

Newsletter for The Word Today

By Douglas W. Schroeder

SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FORGIVENESS

Recently a member asked me a question requiring clarification about something I preached on Easter. I had said only Christians have the authority to forgive sins. I felt the topic is widely misunderstood, and a refresher is pertinent. Here, is my response:

In brief, baptism is necessary as commanded by Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). Believers in Jesus are "born again", and this is an act of God, not the person being baptized. Peter on Pentecost admonished his hearers, "repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)." Some Christian groups suggest that a person must confess Jesus's name prior to baptism. Peter called for repentance as he was preaching to adults. That baptism is also meant for children, or infants, is supported in his additional comment, "The promise is for you and your children..." i.e. Like adoption, a person of any age can be baptized.

Regarding the Holy Spirit and forgiveness, the foundational passages are the one we saw on Sunday, Jesus issuing forth the Holy Spirit (John 20), and the authorizing of Jesus to have his followers act in his stead by pronouncing forgiveness, or when necessary withholding it. See Matthew 16:13-20, where Jesus discusses what we call the "Office of the Keys", or the power to unlock or lock Heaven to people. Note that it was originally said to Peter, but later in Matthew 18:15-18 it is extended to the entire group. All believers have the authority of forgiveness from Christ.

The topic is confusing to people, because the World practices a form of forgiveness, but it is not forgiveness from God. Only through Christ is forgiveness with God accepted, and Christians are to use that forgiveness from God, not some manufactured absolution. The "keys" to unlock or lock Heaven reside with the believer, those who have received the Holy Spirit. Those without the Holy Spirit have no authority, no standing before God and are not empowered to offer God's forgiveness.

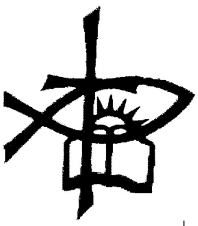
Jesus is the designated Savior, no others. Christians are the designated couriers of God's forgiveness, no others. It is exclusive to Christians because the source of Life and forgiveness must be Jesus. Baptism is the mark, or seal, of being a child of God, a phrase that the World also misappropriates, because only believers in Christ in the New Testament are called "children of God. (See how John the Apostle discusses this in his Gospel in chapter 1:1-14, and I John 3:1-3)."

In summary, it boils down to this: It's "all or nothing" (not a Biblical phrase), a person is either in Christ, Born Again, a believer in Christ, etc. OR they are not in Christ, not Born Again, not in Christ. Persons who are baptized into Christ have been given the Holy Spirit, but should continue in faith by fulfilling the second part of making of a disciple (student of Christ) by "... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28, the Great Commission)". Christians have the Holy Spirit, and the authority for God's forgiveness, and those who are not Christians have no such authority from God. They can "forgive", but this has no weight before the Lord and in the Judgment.

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Finally, this is due to God's grace, not human merit. Back to John 20 again; Jesus' resurrection is the impetus for the giving of the Holy Spirit and empowering the Apostles with authority to forgive, not their merits. Some persons who are Worldly, who do not acknowledge Christ as their Lord, may take offense at this. So be it. Christianity is not a popularity contest; it is the power of salvation to those who believe. There will always be friction/warfare spiritually between Christ and believers versus the standards and beliefs of the World. Christians do not have the authority of forgiveness because we are better, but because it is a gift from God along with grace and salvation.

UNLIMITED PROPAGANDA

The World will often try to promote deviancy as normalcy, and godliness as undesirable. The bus advertisement read, "Love without limits. HIV in real life." It showed happy people supposedly living a joyous life. Acknowledging the potential for contraction of HIV through tainted blood, now a smaller risk, we know that the vast majority of HIV is an outcome of unprotected sex. We also know that needle sharing spreads HIV. The vast majority of people who contract HIV have been engaged in immoral, risky behavior. *The disease does not represent a well-lived life of sexual abstinence, but one of promiscuity and worldliness.* It should not be surprising that in society, chastity is disdained and promiscuity is accepted. The World has a problem with acknowledging God and his will. Still, this does not mean we hate the immoral person; we are to show the love of Christ to all. We simply do not pretend that typically a lewd lifestyle is going to yield a happy, fulfilled life – or a healthy one.

"GO BUY, BUY, BUY..."

A powerful thought struck me as one of the participants in our Wednesday morning Women's Bible Class group lamented the feckless spending of people in our society. She described it as, "They go buy, buy buy..." Immediately I concluded the thought in my mind with a complementary phrase, "... and they go bye, bye, bye!" It reminds me of the Christian slogan, "Know Jesus, Know Peace. No Jesus, No Peace." So, in its entirety my truism would read, "Go buy, buy, buy, and go bye, bye, bye!" Overspend, under-save, be foolish with the material blessings God gives you and watch your security, family and marriage welfare, and perhaps even your health or life itself go bye-bye! It is a wise person who knows that to control spending, to live a balanced life fiscally, is a blessing that imparts joy on many levels.

CASINO LETTER

The man at the post office counter did not look very happy as he was tracking down a certified letter from the casino in Milwaukee. The mind wonders if he was the big shot, high roller weeks or months before, who now is being hunted down for past dues. The wages of sin do not pay very well. I try not to prejudge such situations, but a reminder that godliness and sensibility yield better returns is always timely.

There are times when no matter how much we dedicate ourselves to integrity and sensibility events turn to oppose us. However, this is the exception, not the norm. People in hot water morally and financially often are reaping what they have sown. We are not to hate them, but encourage them to be more responsible, and purposefully assist them in rectifying their situation.

Blessings!
Douglas W. Schroeder