
Words of Truth

Frame Your Withdrawal Letter Next To Your Baptismal Certificate

By: Brian A. Yeager

There are two practices within MANY churches of Christ that are merely traditions of men which we are going to discuss in this article. I am not implying that there are only two practices that are traditions, just that we are only going to discuss these two. First, when a person is baptized, they are given a baptismal certificate. The second, when a person falls away, they are sent a letter that is part of some imaginative process of paper discipline. Now, don't jump to conclusions about this article until you read through it and consider the Scriptures we shall discuss. These traditions have been around for a while and are deeply rooted. Ask yourself, where in the Bible are "Letters Withdrawing Fellowship" or "Certificates Of Baptism"?

Human traditions have always been an error which leads to further errors (i.e. Mark 7:1-9). We are instructed, concerning human traditions, with these words: *"Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh"* (Colossians 2:18-23). Let's discuss the traditions of baptismal certificates and letters of withdrawal.

The Authority For Certificates Of Baptism

In the conversion accounts in the New Testament (Acts 2:1-41, Acts 8:1-39, Acts 9:1-20, Acts 10:1-11:18, Acts 16:13-34, Acts 18:8, and Acts 19:1-7) there is no mention of someone receiving a paper certifying they had been immersed. In the Scriptures concerning teaching and baptizing people (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-20, Romans 6:1-6, etc.) there is nothing written about baptismal certificates.

Many of the churches of Christ that practice the tradition of handing out baptismal certificates also preach that we need authority for all that we say and do. That is correct. We do need authority from the Lord for all we say and do (Luke 4:4, Luke 6:46, Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, and II Timothy 3:15-17). Where is the authority for baptismal certificates? That Scripture is right next to the Scripture authorizing mechanical instruments of music in worship and female elderships. There is no Scriptural authority for any of it. They are all wrong. The judgment for such is the same as any other addition to the Scriptures (Revelation 22:18-19). There is no birth certificate for the saved. Now, what about the letter telling someone they're lost?

The Spiritual Death Certificate (Letter Of Withdrawal)

The Scriptures teach us to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly (II Thessalonians 3:6). What that means is, we are to note [mark] that person and have no company with them (II Thessalonians 3:14-15). That is a clear instruction. Walking orderly would be walking according to what is pleasing to the Lord (I John 2:3-6). Walking disorderly would be the opposite. We are to withdraw ourselves from erring brethren in matters of personal conflict (Matthew 18:15-17) as well as matters of false teaching, division, etc. (Romans 16:17-18).

Consider this context that shows the action explained: *"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (I Corinthians 5:1-13).*

No letter is mentioned in the quoted above. It was not stated that this brother was faithful until he got some letter. The only time some form of a letter would need written is if that were the only form of communication possible to try and restore the lost. However, the practice of withdrawing from a person is fulfilled in not keeping company with he or she, not in the writing or receipt of a letter. Congregational actions are not even needed for you to withdraw from a person. Withdrawing can be an individual action (I Timothy 6:3-5, II Timothy 3:1-5, and Titus 3:9-11). It means you, because of their errors, are not keeping any company with that person. The idea of some necessary letter to end fellowship is both unreasonable and unscriptural.

Conclusion

Something printed on paper does not save a person nor condemn a person. You are either lost or saved based on whether or not you are fully obeying God (II John 1:9). Someone writing you does not change your spiritual state of being. Whether or not we can be in fellowship with someone is not up to us. For us to be in fellowship with someone we FIRST must make sure they are in fellowship with God (I John 1:3-7)! Let's steer clear of these false human traditions.

Milkshakes

Being Able Meat Eaters

By: Brian A. Yeager

On July 3rd of this year we started this series of articles covering some biblical matters that really are simple, milk of the word subjects. Today, we end this series of articles. It is not that we are to forsake the milk of the word, as such is still necessary for us to grow (I Peter 2:1-2). Having said that, we cannot just abide continually in the study of first principles. We are expected by God to grow (II Peter 3:15-18).

This is the context that moved this series of articles. This context was referenced when we began these studies. Now, let's consider the wording carefully before we move on from these basic Bible principles: *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit”* (Hebrews 5:8-6:3).

The people the Hebrew letter was written to were unable to learn the things they needed to because they had not progressed from the milk of the word to the meat. The solution for this was for them to get the first principles down so that they could move on in their growth process. Learning is a building process. As you can see, if you go back to the beginning of this series, learning one thing leads to another. Growth is that kind of process (II Peter 1:3-10).

Once we have learned things such as how to study, apply Bible authority, etc.,; we can move on with those principles to more challenging studies. For example, we learned in this series a little about what will happen at the end of the world (“At The End Of The World”; 10/30/2016). We covered Scriptures that show us that no one knows when Jesus is coming. We covered Scriptures that show that the world will end when Jesus does come. We covered Scriptures that showed that at the Second Coming of Christ the Judgment would commence (Matthew 24:35-39, Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:26-29, I Thessalonians 4:13-17, II Peter 3:9-10, etc.). Now, if you were to study the book of Revelation with those principles in mind, you would know what many things don't mean so that you could deduce what they do mean. The milk helps you be capable of digesting the meat.

As we all study the Bible together and on our own, let's not forget the first principles. Sometimes we may need to refresh our minds (II Peter 1:12 and II Peter 3:1-2). If you find yourself needing to do so, grab some milk from the Scriptures. Until then, get out your steak knife and study some things that will challenge you and make you grow in the faith!