

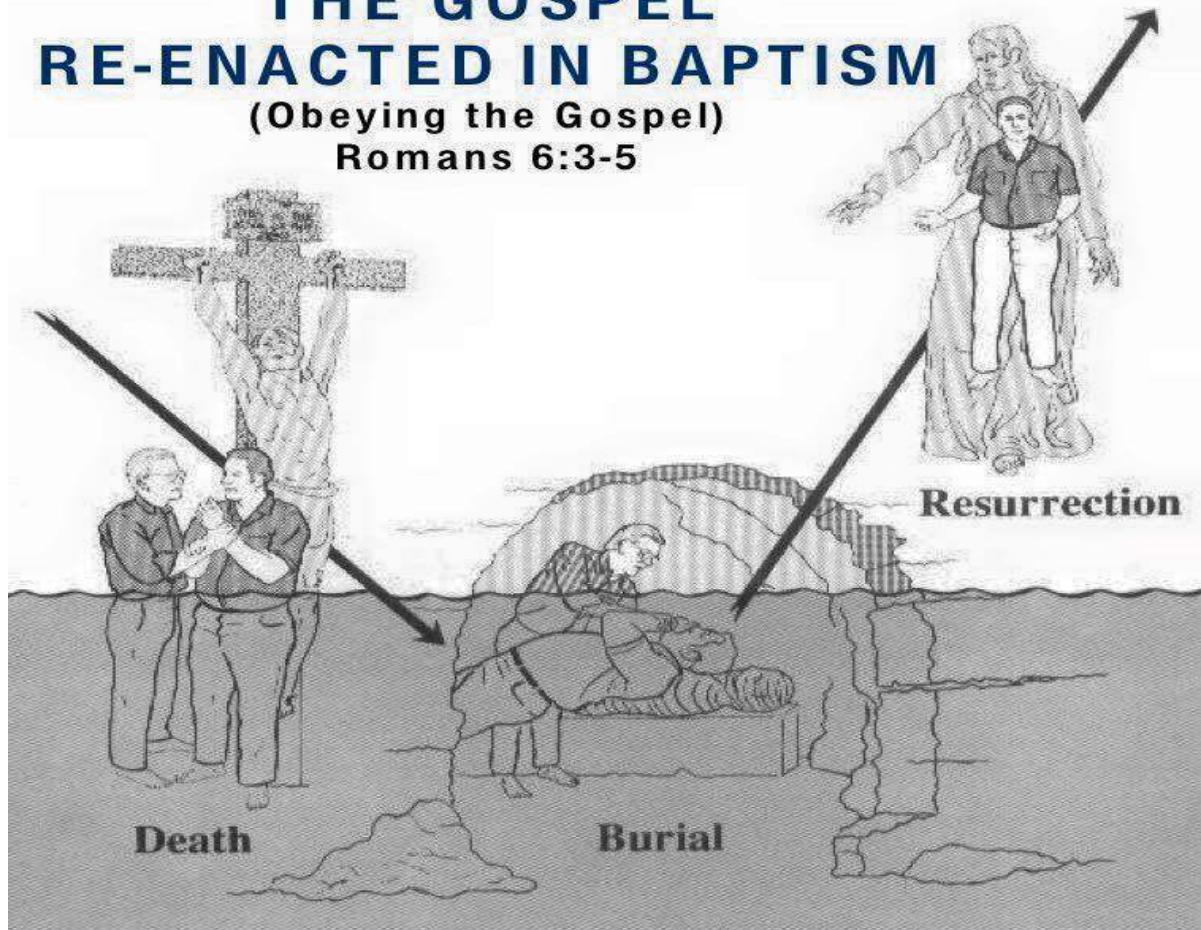
Today's Sermons

Morning: Come Before Winter
Evening: Q & A

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FOR THE RECORD	
Sunday Bible Study	28
Sunday AM Worship	37
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Offering	\$1477

THE GOSPEL RE-ENACTED IN BAPTISM (Obeying the Gospel) Romans 6:3-5



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Times of Services:

Sunday
Bible Study:... 10:00am
AM Worship:...11:00am
PM Worship:...6:00pm
2nd Sunday:.....1:30pm

Wednesday
Bible Study:.....7:00pm

Radio Program
Sunday:.....7:30am
"Back to the Bible"
AM 580 WSKS
93.5 FM

**We Extend A
Warm & Cordial
Welcome
To All Our
Visitors!**

The Leadership of ELDERS

Perry Cotham

Scripture teaches that in each local church, when fully organized, there are "bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). The qualifications of these men are set forth by inspiration in I Timothy 3 and in Titus 1. Of course, Christ is the only head of the church; he has "all authority" (Matthew 28:18), and each congregation is a local independent unit of Christians, directly related to Christ (Ephesians 1:21-22; Romans 16:16).

There are three different terms used in the New Testament for the leaders of the church; each suggests some characteristic of the men and their work.

Elder. This word primarily means an older man, one of age, wisdom and spiritual maturity. The group of elders of a congregation is called the "presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14).

Bishop. This word means an overseer. Paul called for the "elders" of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17), then later he referred to them as "overseers" (v. 28), or bishops." Paul told Titus to ordain "elders in every city" (Titus 1:5), yet each one is called a "bishop" when he gave the qualifications in verse 7. (The

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footnote in the American Standard Version in both Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:7 is "overseer.") This suggests a man who oversees and directs the work of the church; he is a superintendent.

Pastor. Paul said that the Lord gave some in the church to be "pastors" (Ephesians 4:11). The word means the same as a "shepherd," one whose duties are to watch for enemies trying to attack and destroy the sheep, to defend the sheep, and to lead, feed and guide the sheep. The pastors of the church, as shepherds, care for the souls of the congregation, the sheep of God's pasture, in the same way that shepherds care for their flocks. Peter wrote concerning these shepherds:

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder ... feed [tend, ASV: shepherd, NASB] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; nor for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:14; cf. Jeremiah 23:12: Ezekial 34:23).

The Bible never speaks of the preacher as "the pastor of the church," as the expression is often used in the religious world. The preacher is an "evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5), or a "minister" of the gospel (1 Timothy 4:6), whose duty it is to faithfully preach and teach God's power to save the lost (Romans 1:16). Moreover, no one elder is the pastor of the church, although an elder may labor "in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17), and a preacher may serve as one of the elders of the church if selected. All the elders have equal authority (cf. 3 John 9:10). So these terms tell us who these men are, what they do and how they do it.

The church must be governed by a plurality of qualified men who act as under-shepherds to Christ. On Paul's return from his first missionary journey, he "ordained them elders [plural] in every church [singular]" (Acts 14:23). The elders have the right to decide expedient ways to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them by the Lord, but they must give account at the day of judgment of their stewardship (Hebrews 13:17).

The elders do not make laws for Christ; he has already done that. They see that Christ's laws are carried out. The congregation is to "obey" the elders in their decisions (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). The church does not belong to the elders (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25), but to refuse to follow the leaders when they

lead in the way that is right is rebellion against God's constituted authority. Elders have a great work and a great responsibility. (To understand the sin of rebellion against God's authority see Numbers chapters 16 and 17; Jude 1:6, 8, 11.) Nevertheless, it is possible for elders to make a decision that would violate the teaching of the Lord. In that case the Lord must always be obeyed, and it would not be wrong to go against the decision of the elders. "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; 20:30).

The widespread digression that came to the church many years ago would not have occurred if the elders of the churches had remained true to the Bible, and united in carrying out their responsibilities according to God's Word. The same is true today. As a rule, as the leadership goes, so goes the church.

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:2-9).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Jan 5 – Men's Business Meeting & Ladies' Bible Class
- Jan 12 – Preach-N-Eat & 1:30 Service (Song Service)
- Please give support money for Chinese orphans to Jim Winters