

UNDERSTAND?

Jesus once said, *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them"* (Matt. 13:15). "Converted" in this verse is the same as it is in Acts 3:19 where it is said, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..."*. This speaks of obedience to the first principles of the gospel of Christ and is consummated in the act of baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18). With this in mind, it is obvious that some "understanding" is a prerequisite to this obedience. Often people have asked, just what must one know before being baptized. Following are a few things that one needs to understand prior to baptism.

Understand the New Testament is the absolute authority in all matters in the realm of Christianity. This means, just as it is given, without the addition to, or the deletion or subtraction of any part of it (II Tim. 3:16-17; Gal. 1:6-9; Rev. 22:18-19; I Tim. 4:16; II Pet. 1:3). This being the case, our feelings, what we have always believed, what our parents said and what some preacher says, has absolutely nothing to do with what is required of God in order to be saved.

One must understand that God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit have all done their part in making a way for man to have eternal life in heaven. At this time, it's not up to God, it's up to you. If it were up to God, all would be saved (Tit. 2:11; I Tim. 2:3-4). Not all will be saved (Matt. 7:13-14; Matt. 7:21-23), thus it's not up to God. It is man's choice for God has always given man free will (Deut. 11:26-28; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15). God has made salvation available to all, but He does not force anyone to accept it. It was in the hands of the Pentecostians to *"save yourselves from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40) and we must understand it is in our hands now, God has done His part.

One must therefore understand what conditions God has placed on salvation. One cannot accidentally do God's will! Obedience must come from the heart (Rom. 6:17). Faith (a prerequisite to salvation, Mark 16:16) is obtained by learning God's word (Rom. 10:17). One must understand that God has revealed six conditions to obtaining that sought after home in heaven. They are: (1) Hearing God's word (Rom.

10:17; Acts 2:37; Rom. 10:14). (2) Belief/faith (Mk. 16:16; Jn. 8:24). (3) Repentance of past sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19; Lk. 13:3, 5). (4) Confess Christ (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37). (5) Be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27; Acts 22:16). (6) Live faithfully (Rev. 2:10; II Pet. 2:20-22). These are conditions that God has placed on salvation. To bind them as prerequisites to salvation is not salvation by works as some propose, but is salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) realizing that "by faith" does not exclude meeting God's conditions. James clearly shows that obedience to God's conditions is included in a true and living faith (James 2:20-26).

It is needful for one to understand the life of a Christian as it pertains to the church. The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). When one is baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), he is baptized into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). When one obeys the conditions as set forth by God, God adds or places that individual into the body or church (Acts 2:47; I Cor. 12:18). Certainly one could be baptized into Christ without understanding the connection with the body, but to what end? Immediate unfaithfulness! Since step six of the conditions was that one was to live faithfully and since living faithfully includes one's work and worship in the body, one could not possibly keep the sixth condition without understanding the one true body of Christ as presented in the New Testament.

Though man does not have to know everything in order to be a candidate for baptism, there are some things one must know in order for the baptism to be of any value at all. Just being immersed in water does not constitute a scriptural and soul cleansing baptism, it simply gets one wet. Often we hear that in the Bible, teaching was so short that it is not possible that these people were taught all these things. First, one must keep in mind this was not the first teaching they had received. Their old testament had been preparing them for this very thing to happen. Secondly, they did not have to be "un-taught" the various denominational doctrines, for there were none. Unlike the complicated doctrines of many of the religions of today that call themselves "Christian", the true gospel of Christ is simple and does not take long to teach.

Now, understanding all that, *"now why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16).

(Tilis)