

Untrue Teachings of the True Jesus Church

Regeneration, the initial stage of salvation, is unquestionably the most significant event in human life. Salvation, the receiving of Jesus Christ as one's Savior, is the receiving of a living person. Consequently, new believers often find themselves in love with Christ Himself, not with a mere doctrine. They do not simply know *about* salvation; they know the *Savior*. How heartbreaking it is, then, to see new believers gradually diverted by unscriptural doctrines from experiencing the One they love. The True Jesus Church seeks to bring people to an initial saving knowledge of Christ. Nonetheless, some of its teachings distract new believers from a Christ-centered focus to a legalistic preoccupation with prescribed forms. This article will examine the teachings of the True Jesus Church (hereafter TJC) regarding salvation, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, prayer, water baptism, and Sabbath-keeping. The purpose of this article is to highlight several examples of well-intentioned teachings which can actually disorient new believers from a Christ-centered walk. All of the quotations related to the doctrine and practices of the TJC are taken from "The Way of Salvation" and "Our Basic Beliefs" sections of its website, www.tjc.org.

How Can I Be Saved?

The Bible's prescription for salvation is purposely and exclusively simple—to repent and believe in Jesus the Savior. This scriptural simplicity is perhaps the most striking testimony to the perfection of Christ's finished redemptive work—it leaves nothing for the sinner to do except receive it.

The TJC instructs those concerned with their eternal destiny to "accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior" (The Way of Salvation). It encourages them to "confess...all your past sins" and "ask for the Lord's forgiveness" (Way). But from this simple beginning, its teachings quickly muddy the salvific message by adding further, extrascriptural requirements. The TJC website presents a complicated five-step salvation formula. In the first step, "Believe," the church's website states that one should believe in God and accept Christ and "the Gospel of Salvation," but then it adds the qualifier "preached by the True Church" (Way). Sadly, the gospel of salvation offered by the TJC has forsaken the Bible's simplicity for its own complex procedure.

The second sub-heading, "Repent," directs seekers to confess their sins and ask for the Lord's forgiveness but then adds the requirement: "Determine to change your ways and to obey the commandments of God" (Way). While it is true that a person who has freshly encountered the Savior spontaneously desires to please Him in all things, this yearning is the *result* of salvation, not its *prerequisite*. It is not our earnestness for salvation that saves us but our faith in Christ which unites us to the Savior Himself.

A third requirement for salvation under the TJC's formula is to "accept baptism performed by the True Church" (Way). This statement implies that water baptism is necessary for redemption and that it must be performed by their church. Admittedly, a person who believes and is baptized is saved (Mark 16:16), yet the Bible never mandates water baptism as the means for regeneration. Rather, baptism properly *follows* conversion. For example, we know that the thief on the cross was granted eternal life yet was never baptized. Paul was baptized three days after his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18), and Cornelius and his household were baptized *after* they received the Spirit (10:47). Most clearly, when the Philippian jailer explicitly asked, "What must I do to be saved?" the apostle Paul answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (16:30-31), not even mentioning baptism as a requirement for salvation though given the perfect opportunity to do so.

The TJC adds further requirements under the sub-heading "Obey the Commandments." In order to be saved, the reader is instructed to "love God by practicing His Word" and "love others as yourself by doing good deeds" (Way). In themselves these commandments are innocuous, even scriptural, but as conditions appended to the gospel they seriously err, implying the addition of works to faith and thus diminishing the finished work of Christ.

The TJC imposes further demands on the repentant sinner by admonishing him to "pray sincerely and earnestly for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit" and, in order to be saved, to "live by the Holy Spirit and become a new person" (Way). The Bible, however, charges us to be saved first and then be renewed, not to become a new person in order to be saved. The TJC's teachings again mistake the *results* of salvation for its *prerequisites*. It is only after a person is

reconciled to God that he is able to experience the life-changing effects of God's organic work (Rom. 5:10).

Also unscriptural is the TJC's insistence on evidence of salvation in the form of "the speaking of tongues" (Way). Paul plainly said to the tongues-obsessed Corinthians that not every Christian speaks in tongues (1 Cor. 12:30). Even more important, tongue-speaking is *never* taught in the Bible as evidence of salvation. In fact, when enumerating the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, Paul bypasses the subject entirely. Further, in Romans, a book which details God's complete salvation, Paul never even brings up the subject. All of God's spiritual blessings are in Christ (Eph. 1:3); accordingly, all of our instructions to new believers should serve to focus and maintain their simple enthrallment with His wonderful person.

Receiving the Holy Spirit

The TJC's teaching concerning receiving the Spirit seriously errs in several respects. Primarily, it confuses regeneration by the Spirit with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The TJC website states that "the baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to the descent and indwelling of God's Spirit," and that regeneration's "sign and evidence...is speaking of unintelligible tongues" by "everyone," that is, every believer. It also promises that the Christian will often experience the Spirit through physical "body movement, warmth, and indescribable inner joy" (Our Basic Beliefs: the Baptism of the Holy Spirit).

First, the Bible clearly distinguishes between regeneration by the Spirit and baptism in the Spirit. The disciples received the indwelling Spirit who was breathed into them a full fifty days before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On that day in the closed room, the resurrected Christ breathed His essence into the disciples, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Next, the Lord began to train the disciples to know Him inwardly, to know His invisible, indwelling presence rather than the outward, physical relationship to which they were accustomed. Ultimately, on the day of Pentecost they were clothed with the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; Luke 24:49) by being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). When a person believes in the Lord, he experiences regeneration and is born of God the Spirit in his spirit (John 3:6). When power and authority are needed, such as when preaching the gospel, the same believer experiences the Spirit as his mantle, his authorization, by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are distinct experiences.

Second, receiving the Holy Spirit is not evidenced by the speaking of unintelligible tongues. The tongues spoken in Acts chapter two were authentic languages readily understood by a multilingual audience (vv. 4-11). Furthermore,

as mentioned previously, the Bible teaches by both example and omission that tongue-speaking is not a universal experience. A third error is associating the receiving of the Spirit with "body movement" and "warmth" (Basic: Holy Spirit). This teaching erroneously predisposes new believers to expect particular physical sensations and reactions. One can imagine the disappointment and frustration of new Christians who neither speak in tongues nor experience these sensations and movements. In actuality, such an experience is contrary to Paul's description of the fruit of the Spirit as "self-control" (Gal. 5:23). Moreover, one filled with the Spirit does not always feel indescribable joy. It is possible for believers to grieve, mourn, and sorrow while still being filled with the Spirit. For example, it is possible to be blessed while mourning (Matt. 5:4) and to suffer with others who are suffering (1 Cor. 12:26) while being filled with the Spirit. Certainly there is joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17), but to link particular physical sensations and movements with the receiving of the Spirit is to incline the new believer toward the sensual and away from the preciousness of Christ's person.

How Do I Receive the Holy Spirit?

According to the TJC's teaching, in order to receive the Spirit one must "pray earnestly and persistently to God to fill you with His Spirit" (Basic: Holy Spirit). Here, once again, it is the believers' effort and tenacity that persuade God to respond. The Bible, however, presents the opposite picture. When the first disciples received the Spirit in John 20:22, it was simply by means of their spiritual breathing, without a lengthy period of preparation or any spiritual calisthenics. Similarly, in Lamentations 3:55-57 Jeremiah refers to his practice of calling on the Lord as his spiritual "breathing." Additionally, in Ephesians 5:18-19 Paul shows how easily and enjoyably one can "be filled in spirit...singing and psalming with your heart." In sum, both the initial receiving of the Holy Spirit and the continual filling with the Spirit are not predicated on the believers' persistent effort but rather take place spontaneously as he turns his heart to the Lord, whether by praying, singing, or calling on the Lord's name.

Since according to the TJC a lengthy, persistent prayer is required in order to receive the Spirit, it outlines a detailed method of prayer, as follows: The believer must "Kneel with humility. Close your eyes to concentrate. Begin by saying 'In the name of Lord Jesus I pray.' Praise the Lord by saying 'Hallelujah'" (Basic: Holy Spirit). Again, the time factor is stressed: "Spend time to speak with God from your heart and ask Him to fill you with the Holy Spirit" (Basic: Holy Spirit).

Finally, the seeking believer is instructed: "Conclude your prayer with 'Amen'" (Basic: Holy Spirit). While there is

certainly nothing unscriptural about praising the Lord, saying “Hallelujah” and “Amen,” or reciting at the beginning of one’s prayer, “In the name of the Lord Jesus,” it is troubling that these phrases—in their prescribed order—are given as a formula for prayer. Prayer is not a method which, when followed according to directions, will secure the petitioner’s desire. Rather, prayer is, in its highest definition, contact with the Triune God in order to allow Him to transmit Himself as the Spirit into us. Simply stated, by means of prayer we are brought into direct contact with His precious person. Whether God grants our request or not is secondary; what is primary is that through prayer He dispenses Himself into us as vessels now opened by means of our prayer. The TJC’s formula for prayer again illustrates how teachings concerning spiritual things (e.g., prayer) can actually distract believers from the central point of the Christian faith and walk—the person of Christ.

The Baptism of Water

The most unscriptural teaching of the TJC is the bizarre assertion that the blood of Christ is contained in the baptismal waters. The TJC states, “God has confirmed the baptism in the True Jesus Church by showing countless visions of Jesus’ blood in the water and by working miracles of healing” (Our Basic Beliefs: the Baptism of Water). Visions and healings are easily fabricated and should never be used to establish doctrine, especially one stating that the blood of Christ is located in the True Jesus Church’s baptismal waters. Water baptism, as defined and performed by the TJC, has been added to their list of prerequisites for salvation. The TJC validates this astonishing notion by appealing to 1 John 5:6-8, which states that the water of baptism, the blood, and the Spirit all testify of one thing. Based on these verses, the TJC teaches that the blood of Christ and the Spirit are physically present “in the water during baptisms performed by the Church” (Basic: Baptism). However, as verse 7 clarifies, these three entities remain distinct (blood, water, and Spirit), yet they are one in what they testify (v. 8). What do they testify? Verse 9 tells us that they testify “concerning His Son.” It is interesting that the Scripture provides three separate testimonies regarding the Son: one related to the water (Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:31), another to the blood (John 19:31-35; Matt. 27:50-54), and the third to the Spirit (John 1:32-34; 3:34). These three *different* entities are in agreement and testify one thing, that Jesus is the Son of God. None of these verses imply in any way that the three form a compound of baptismal water/blood/Spirit.

The TJC further confounds this scriptural distinction by calling the baptismal waters “a redeeming fountain” (Basic: Baptism). Once again, its teaching misdirects believers to its ceremonial procedure for salvation rather than emphasizing the Savior Himself. Among other ritualistic items, the candidate must believe the “TJC as His body,” must

have his “head bowed,” and must be immersed “in natural flowing water” (Basic: Baptism). The website even goes so far as to illustrate a procedure of baptism with an instructional diagram, “The Biblical Way of Baptism,” something completely foreign to the Bible. What is most important about baptism is not the mode, method, or phraseology employed; it is the believer’s immersion into the Triune God. Believers should be led to appreciate the fact that it is not the baptismal water that cleanses us, but the Savior, whom we contact, who cleanses us (Acts 22:16).

Keeping the Sabbath

The TJC compounds its legalistic rubric of requirements by stating, “Sabbath observance is a commandment to every God-worshiper” (Our Basic Beliefs: the Sabbath Day), and “Today, God wants all believers to honor this day as well” (Basic: Sabbath). The church encourages its members to worship on Saturday and “rest from worldly tasks and cares” (Basic: Sabbath). It erroneously states that the New Testament believers kept the Sabbath instead of the Lord’s Day, attributing that later change to Constantine.

Actually, the New Testament believers observed the Lord’s Day and considered the Sabbath as a shadow of the coming Christ (Rev. 1:10; Col. 2:16-17). The coming of Christ is the coming of the real Sabbath, because He is our real rest. In fact, Paul warned the Gentiles not to allow others to bring them back to the “shadows,” including the Sabbath (Gal. 4:9-11). This issue was settled conclusively when the “pillars” of the church, in considering which Old Testament restrictions the Gentiles were obligated to keep, listed only the abstaining from fornication and from eating things that have been sacrificed to idols, blood, and the meat of strangled animals (Acts 15:28-29). If the Sabbath had applied to the believing Gentiles, as the TJC teaches, it surely would have been mentioned in this passage.

What is even more strange is the TJC’s personification of the Sabbath. That day is ascribed personal attributes which should refer instead to the Lord Himself. The TJC, however, maintains that the ritualistic keeping of the Sabbath “reminds us...points clearly...urges us...is the constant renewal” and “guides God-fearing people” (Basic: Sabbath). The keeping of a day in effect replaces the believer’s experience of the person who is our Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9).

These examples illustrate how easy it is to be well-intentioned in teaching new believers and yet by means of inaccurate notions distract them from the very center of their salvation—Christ Himself. The TJC makes this profoundly serious mistake. Let the believers in Christ, the children of God, beware!

by Gary Evans