

THE RICHES OF JOHN BUNYAN

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The following is an extended quote from the aforementioned book. John Bunyan is here explaining the qualifications for church membership. Note particularly the italicized parts of this discussion.

2. As this unity and peace may consist with the ignorance of many truths, and with the holding some errors, so it must consist with (and it cannot consist without) the believing and practicing those things which are necessary to salvation and church-communion; and they are 1st, Believing that Christ the Son of God died for the sins of men. 2d, *That whoever believeth ought to be baptized.* The third thing essential to this communion, is a holy and a blameless conversation.

(1) That believing that the Son of God died for the sins of men is necessary to salvation, I prove by these texts, which tell us, that he that doth not believe shall be damned, Mark 16:16; John 3:36; Rom. 10:9.

That it is also necessary to church-communion appears from Matt. 16:16-18. Peter having confessed that Christ was the Son of the living God, Christ thereupon assures Peter, that upon this rock, viz., this profession of faith, or this Christ which Peter had confessed, he would build his church, and the gates of hell should not prevail against it. And, I Cor. 3:11, the apostle having told the Corinthians that they were God's building, presently adds, that they could not be built upon any foundation but upon that which was laid, which was Jesus Christ. All which proves, that Christian society is founded upon the profession of Christ; and not only scripture, but the laws of right reason, dictate this, that some rules and orders must be observed for the founding all society, which must be consented to by all that will be of it. Hence it comes to pass, that to own Christ as the Lord and head of Christians

is essential to the founding of Christian society.

(2) The Scriptures have declared, that this faith gives the professors of it a right to baptism, as in the case of the eunuch, Acts 8. When he demanded why he might not be baptized, Philip answered, that if he believed with all his heart, he might. The eunuch thereupon confessing Christ, was baptized.

Now, that baptism is essential to church-communion, I prove from I Cor. 12, where we shall find the apostle labouring to prevent an evil use that might be made of spiritual gifts, as thereby to be puffed up, and to think that such as wanted them were not of the body, or to be esteemed members: he thereupon resolves, that whoever did confess Christ, and own him for his head, did it by the Spirit, ver. 3, though they might not have such a visible manifestation of it as others had, and therefore they ought to be owned as members, as appears, ver. 23. And not only because they have called him Lord by the Spirit, but because they have, by the guidance and direction of the same Spirit, been baptized, ver. 13, "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body," &c. I need not go about to confute that notion that some of late have had of this text, viz., that the baptism here spoken of is the baptism of the Spirit, because you have not owned and declared that notion as your judgement, but on the contrary, all of you that I have ever conversed with, have declared it to be understood of baptism with water, by the direction of the Spirit: If so, then it follows, that

men and women are declared members of Christ's body by baptism, and cannot be by scripture reputed and esteemed so without it; which further appears from Rom. 6:5, where men by baptism are said to be "planted" into the likeness of his death; and Col. 2:12, we are said to be "buried with him" by baptism. All which, together with the consent of all Christians (some few in these later times excepted), do prove that baptism is necessary to the initiating persons into the Church of Christ.

(3) Holiness of life is essential to church-communion, because it seems to be the reason why Christ founded a church in the world, viz., that men might thereby be watched over, and kept from falling; and that if any be overtaken with a fault, he that is spiritual might restore him, that by this means men and women might be preserved without blame to the coming of Christ; and the grace of God teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and uprightly in this present evil world; Tit. 2:11,12. "And let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity;" 2 Tim. 2:19. And James tells us

(speaking of the Christian religion), that "pure religion, and undefiled before God, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world;" James 1:27. From all which (together with many more texts that might be produced) it appears, that an unholy and profane life is inconsistent with Christian religion and society; and that holiness is essential to salvation and church-communion. So that these three things, faith, baptism, and a holy life, as I said before, all churches must agree and unite in, as those things which, when wanting, will destroy their being. And let not any think, that when I say, believing the Son of God died for the sins of men is essential to salvation and church-communion, that I hereby would exclude all other articles of the Christian creed as not necessary; as the belief of the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment, &c., which, for want of time, I omit to speak particularly to, and the rather, because I understand this great article of believing the Son of God died for the sins of men is comprehensive of all others, and is that from whence all other articles may easily be inferred.

It is clear that John Bunyan understood I Corinthians 12:13 to deal with water baptism as the means of entrance into the local church. What is particularly interesting is that he declares that this is the belief of all Baptist preachers he is acquainted with.