

## HOW DOES ONE GET INTO THE BODY?

So far, we have discussed the nature of the one true church for which Jesus died. We have given the names offered in Scripture for that church and we have shown that being in that church is essential to one's eternal salvation. If these things are true, then the next question must deal with admission to that church or body. Put another way, we will examine the things one must do to become part of the body of Christ.

Two initial steps are self-evident: Hearing and coming to a knowledge of truth is so obvious as to need no further examination. Romans 10:17 concludes: "...faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Next, Hebrews 11:6 states that "...without faith it is impossible to please Him." Hearing is essential else one would not know what to do or why it must be done.

But belief in what is heard is also essential. Continuing in Hebrews 10 the writer says "...he that cometh to God must believe that He is..." (Hebrews 11:6). Then he offers the example of numerous men and women of faith all of whom believed in God and acted upon their faith. We might say that they had an active faith which caused them to obey God. In fact James argues that the mere belief that God exists is insufficient. (James 2:19). A true faith is active and alive (James 1:22-25; 2:14-26).

One must also repent of sinfulness. That is, one must determine to walk in God's light and cease any actions inconsistent with following Jesus. Repentance was preached by John the Baptist at the coming of Jesus (Matthew 3:2). Jesus made repentance a centerpiece of His own preaching (Matthew 9:13; Luke 13:3,5). In the early church, repentance was required of all wishing to be a part of the church (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). Continuing repentance is required as man will continue to sin (Romans 3:23; 5:12; I John 1:8). The difference between the worldly man and God's man is that God's man constantly tries to avoid sinning and seeks to be more like Jesus daily.

One must also profess his faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. God's word knows nothing of secret disciples. There are no covert agents in God's army. Solomon realized that confession of God's name was essential for the forgiveness of the Israelites (I Kings 8:33ff). Likewise, God expects us to confess or profess the name of Jesus. As Jesus instructed His 12 Apostles, He told them to teach others to confess His name before men (Matthew 10:32; Luke 12:8). Paul instructs confession in Romans 10:9-10. The confession in all these cases was reciprocal: Jesus will confess us before the Father if we confess Him before men. Acts 8:37 commonly serves as the confession we make before men.

So we see that there are at least four steps, to this point in gaining entrance to the church. Let us remember that it is God who sets the standards and the terms of entrance and it is He who adds one to the church (Acts 2:47).

There is a fifth and final step commanded and demonstrated by example in Scripture. It is this step over which so much confusion exists today. While the denominational world almost universally agrees that one must hear, believe, repent and confess, many reject the final, beautiful step through which we enter the likeness of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. It is this step which many have relegated to a merely optional ceremony. Baptism is essential to salvation every bit as much as repentance or confession. Believers at Pentecost interrupted Peter and asked to know what must be done to be saved. He said "...repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Jesus final earthly command to His Apostles is recorded in Mark 16:15,16: "...Go ye unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned..." In coming issues we will examine each of these five steps in greater detail.

Bryant Evans

**NEXT WEEK: TRUE HEARING OF TRUTH**