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Conducted by  
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**“What would be your reaction if a person expressed a desire to be immersed in response to the Gospel, but stated that afterwards he wanted to attend a church of his own choice?”**

This is a difficult question, and one which cannot be answered lightly because I am well aware that there are firmly entrenched views on both sides of the question. One prominent brother in the States, who is both well-respected and loved in the Lord, has held that anyone who has been immersed into Christ is his brother or sister irrespective of where they may attend for worship. Many Christians feel if a person attends a Gospel meeting, and responds positively to the invitation, that no one has the right to refuse baptism. Who am I, to challenge the judgement of so many? I have, however, been asked to give **my** reaction to the question, and I shall attempt to do so as factually as I can, and argue the case as closely as I can.

The first point which crosses my mind is, “What would constitute a **positive response** to the Gospel invitation”? Is it simply a desire to be immersed because we believe that immersion is the correct and scriptural way to be baptised, or does it signify a more enduring love for Christ which would prompt us to obey Him in **all** respects? Before we can answer these supplementary questions, we need to examine the scriptural evidence regarding **salvation**, because surely that is what we are talking about.

### SALVATION IN CHRIST

Shortly before He returned to His Father, Jesus gave instructions to His Disciples, **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”** Mk. 16:15,16. To the cursory reader this might suggest that once a person has been baptised, then his salvation is assured for all time. We must, however, understand that **‘to believe’** does not signify just mere credence, but strictly means ‘a reliance upon’. Now if I **rely** upon someone, I don’t turn my back on that person. Similarly, the Gospel is an on-going experience, because the Gospel is the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus, and therefore I cannot relate my belief in the Gospel just to some point in time when I was said to have ‘obeyed’ it; if Christ is the Gospel, then I must **go on** believing it and Him for the rest of my life. As Peter says, I must go on adding to my faith in order to make my calling (by the Gospel) and my election (by the grace of God **through** the Gospel) sure. (See 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

With regard to the foregoing, the Christian neophyte must answer two further questions. Can I add to my conversion faith by staying away from the fellowship of the Church, and work out my own salvation from thereon; or, shall I return to the Church which **did not teach me the truth of the Gospel** in the first place, for the simple reason that all my ‘friends’ are there? (This, of course, is the substance of the original question).

### THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Gospel makes it plain that we are baptised into Christ Jesus. **“Know ye not,”** says Paul in Rom. 6, **“that so many of us were baptised into Christ were baptised into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ rose from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness**

of life". In his second letter to Corinth Paul says, **"Therefore if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"** 2 Cor. 5:17. Concerning Christ, Paul says in his Ephesian letter, **"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him which filleth all in all"**. Eph. 1:22,23. So when we are baptised into Christ, we are baptised into His Body, and that Body is the Church. Christ is the Head of the Body, so He is Head of the Church. That seems to be fairly straight forward, and is in line with Matt. 16:16-18 where it is recorded that Jesus said that He would build **His Church**, and that it would be based on the confession of Peter that He, Jesus, was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The foregoing leads us on to a further question. "Where, then, do we find the Church of Christ today? Is it such a loose organism that its members are scattered throughout denominational Christendom, or is it a unique fellowship whose faith and practice attempt to mirror the early days of Christianity, taking as its only standard the divine will of God as revealed by His Christ and Apostles, and passed on to mankind in the Holy Word of God, the Bible?"

#### THE POST-PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE

Acts chapter 2 records that after Peter had preached the Gospel on that first Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus, that three thousand people responded to the call of the Gospel and were immersed in water into Christ. The record then goes on, **"And they (the immersed) continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . And all that believed were together, and had all things common . . ."** Acts 2:42-47.

There are detractors who say that some of those early Christians very quickly fell away from the high ideal set before them, e.g. Ananias and Sapphira, but the fact that **some** defect does not make the **ideal** unreal or unattainable; it simply means that some people are defective in their **appreciation** of what the ideal stands for. Isn't this true of every age, and isn't this why the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17) is so splintered and shattered? It is high time that we today faced the ideal squarely and, like Paul **"forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"** Phil. 3:13,14.

This is not only an **individual** effort, but must be a **united** effort by a **united** Church, for the sake of the One who **"loved the Church and gave Himself for it"**. I fail to see how this united effort can take place if some members of the Lord's Body keep their allegiance with disunited denominationalism. It seems to me that such 'converts' are attempting to maintain some semblance of 'spiritual affinity' with Christ while denying the way in which **true** spiritual affinity come through practice, i.e., by communion of saints, and participatory fellowship **with** the saints in the Church. If that is not the case, then the focal point of that sort of 'conversion' is nothing more than the obedience to a command to be immersed in water, as distinct from the 'sprinkling' which the neophyte might have undergone when a baby. Is that enough? Not for me, it isn't.

What I am challenging is the idea that some people have regarding conversion to Christ. Conversion in its truest sense means not only a turning **from**, but also a turning **to**. Take the case of a person who attends a particular denominational Church, comes into a Gospel meeting, and hears baptism by immersion preached. Such a person may reason, "Oh, well, I've been converted but I've now learned that the 'sprinkling' I had when a baby is not good enough and I now need to be immersed. I'd better get it done, and then everything will be alright, and I can return to my Church with an easy mind". This, to me, seems to be a complete reliance on overt acts which ostensibly represent faith, I would have serious doubts whether such an

attitude represents real commitment to Christ.

### PROBLEMS WITH BONDING

Speaking practically, I can pass a rope around a small group of people, or books, or other things, and **bind** them together. Bricks could be laid upon each other, but without being **bonded** together with cement, they would make a very unstable edifice. Metaphorically speaking, Christians are said to be **bound together** in Christ and with Him. It is this fact more than any other which should give us a clue as to what true bonding in Christ should be. It would be pointless, for instance, to leave out bricks from a house which I was building, and put them into a different house in the next street. It would be equally pointless to leave a vital organ out of my physical body and then expect the body to function efficiently. In his Ephesian letter Paul speaks about 'the supply of every joint of the Body', so that the **co-operative** effort of **every** joint makes the Body upbuild itself in love. (See Eph. 4:15,16). In his Colossian letter he develops the idea of Christ being the Head of the Body. He shows how believers are **knit together**, and how the joints in the Body are **bonded** together. He gives a beautiful picture of how efficiently the Body of Christ can work; just as how the human body can work when all parts are operating efficiently. Can anyone doubt the meaning of this teaching with regard to our question?

My reaction, then, is quite simple and straight forward. If I were an Elder of an assembly of Christians, and someone wanted to be immersed but was quite adamant that he/she was **not going** to have fellowship in the Church with brothers and sisters of like mind and like faith, then I would have serious doubts as to whether the baptism ought to go ahead at all. Why should I be party to sending them back, ostensibly cleansed, to an organisation which did not preach and practise the things which were taught in God's Word? My reasons for thinking as I do are entirely scriptural. They have nothing to do with my opinion.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 20 Costessy Way,  
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## WHAT A FELLOWSHIP

One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is that of Christian fellowship. In Acts 2, after Peter had preached to thousands on the Day of Pentecost, the first things we read about is the fellowship of those new Christians.

We read that they devoted themselves to the fellowship, were all together and had everything in common, sacrificed to give anyone in need, and met together every-day and practised hospitality with one another in their homes.

From these passages we are reminded not only of the importance of being devoted to the fellowship surrounding our worship services, devotionals, classes and special congregational events, but the emphasis placed on daily fellowship among the believers. Christian fellowship is a valuable part of any Christian's life. Without it, it would be impossible to fulfil the command Jesus gives to "Love each other". God never intended for Christians to just come to services, or just study our Bibles or just pray. When we become Christians we are "baptised into the body of Christ" and no longer independent of God and His people. Each of us has become "part of the body of Christ". We now have the responsibility to Christ and each other to become devoted and totally committed to the fellowship of believers. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read of any substitute for deep and meaningful relationships among brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are taught to :

- "Encourage One Another Daily".

It is impossible to encourage one another on a daily basis without fellowship.