

In search of...

Truth & Right

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That's Your Interpretation

"But that's just your interpretation; yours and the rest of those folks up at the church of Christ where you go," Joe said as he and his co-worker Chuck discussed the bible during their lunch break. "Baptism actually has nothing to do with getting saved – everybody knows that!"

Chuck slowly looked around at their co-workers at the other picnic tables enjoying the noon hour sunshine. As his eyes settled on Simon who sat engrossed in the local paper, he thoughtfully turned back to Joe and said, "Let me ask you a question Joe. Suppose in today's paper, there was a Hopeland Store ad that said, 'Free fifty-dollar Hopeland gift cards given out to the first fifty families to come through the door this coming Friday. Gift cards valid at local location only, and expire Friday night at midnight. One card per family; must be eighteen or over to obtain card.'"

"Now, what if someone showed up Thursday evening, was sixteen, and wanted a card? Would they get one?" Chuck said. Joe shook his head no. "Well, what about if a person showed up

Friday morning, stood in line, and was a member of the fifty-third family to enter the store? Should they expect one?" Again, Joe shook his head no.

"Or try this," Chuck continued. "What if someone showed up, was over eighteen, was part of the sixth family to enter the store on Friday morning, received their card, and then either tried to cash it in on Saturday, or over at Wal-Mart, or at the Sand Springs Hopeland – even if a friend or family member that they totally trusted had told them that that's what the rules actually meant, despite what they literally said in big, bold, black and white print?"

Joe, beginning to get just a little bit frustrated at Chuck's seemingly endless and somewhat elementary inquiries, responded rather impatiently, "Well then, no, of course they wouldn't get to spend the card. Look Chuck, I can read. What's your point?"

"The point is simply this Joe," Chuck answered patiently. "And it's an extremely important one. How is it that the whole town can – and is completely expected to without a single second thought – read and understand an ad

like I've described, exactly alike? One reading, and they completely understand and accept the implications of every aspect of the ad, and then plan and act accordingly? They understand the "ground rules" of receiving this free gift card, without exception, exemption, or interpretation. They read and immediately accept that the rules mean exactly what they say, as written in straightforward black and white, and prepare to meet the requirements if they want to receive the free gift. ...And yet, when it comes to some of the bible's plainest, simplest, most straightforward and easiest to understand of instructions, some of those very same folks seem to always want to insist that those are somehow a 'matter of interpretation' and that it's therefore okay if we all understand them completely differently?"

Chuck leaned in seriously and looked Joe straight in the eye. "Joe, you don't believe that man is smarter than God, do you? I know you don't. And yet, if anyone believes that a salesman-authored ad and its written requirements to receive a free gift can be easily understood alike by all who read it, but that somehow God's straightforward black and white written requirements in order to receive His free gift cannot be, then what they are actually saying is that a mere human being is smart enough to know how to communicate clearly with men, while their almighty God and all-knowing Creator is somehow not. Think about that for a minute Joe..."

"And, let me give you an example," Chuck continued as he thumbed through the well-worn pages of the small bible he always had handy at work. "Please read this

passage," he said as he handed Joe his bible, pointing to Mark 16:15-16. "And He said to them, 'Go into 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,'" Joe read slowly aloud.

"Now," Chuck continued, "a simple question; honestly, how do you 'interpret' that verse Joe? Does it mean that he who believes is saved at that point and should soon thereafter be baptized, as so many teach today? Or does it mean exactly what it says – that belief and baptism must both precede salvation?"

Joe's mind raced to find a reasonable response. He could read and he knew he was caught. His indefensible and flimsy fog of man-made excuses and explanations were being blown away before his very eyes. It was also at that moment that something else occurred to him for the very first time as well. The way that verse read, if he said that baptism wasn't essential to and must precede being saved, then the same could be said for the other element that verse contained – that belief wasn't essential to and must precede being saved either – and he knew better than to say that... so he said nothing instead.

Sitting there in the suddenly stifling silence and sensing his friend's indecision, Chuck softly tried again. "When we read in Acts 2:38, that Peter answered those seeking God's forgiveness by saying that they should 'Repent and be baptized, every one of them in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins,' what did he literally mean? Really, how would you 'interpret' that Joe? That they should say a prayer inviting Jesus into their hearts to be forgiven and then should be baptized? That baptism was nothing more than an outward sign of an inward grace, and as an indication that salvation had already occurred

sometime previously? Or... that they needed to be baptized specifically FOR the forgiveness of their sins, just as it very simply and plainly says in straightforward black and white?"

"But... we're saved by faith and faith alone!" Joe stammered... "Baptism doesn't save anyone!" Joe continued without much conviction, resorting only to quoting what he'd heard so many denominational preachers so proudly spout so many times before...

"Then what do you make of this?" Chuck asked as he pointed Joe to James 2:19-24 and asked him to read it. Phrases like 'even the demons believe – and shudder,' and, 'You see then that a man is justified by works, and NOT by faith only' struck and stuck in Joe's mind as if delivered by a divine sledgehammer.

"You see," Chuck continued, "baptism for the forgiveness or washing away of our sins is how and when we call on the name of the Lord to be saved, according to Acts 22:16. It is the also the act of faith by which we become God's children, according to Galatians 3:26-27. Let's take a look at those two texts and see if your 'interpretation' isn't exactly the same as-"

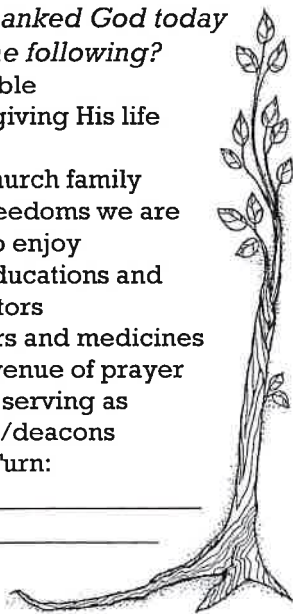
Just then the whistle signaling the end of their lunch hour suddenly sounded. Hastily gathering up their lunch containers and disposing of their garbage, Chuck, quite concerned for his friend's soul, chimed in one more time, "Listen Joe, if anyone truly believes that baptism doesn't have anything to do with saving us – especially when 1st Peter 3:21 expressly states that 'baptism DOES now save us' – well, that's not a matter of interpretation, but a matter of interpolation. If you truly believe the bible is God's word, then let's get together and take a closer look at some of those texts tonight, shall we? What do you say Joe?"

Doug Dingley

**DEAR GOD,
I WANNA TAKE A
MINUTE, NOT TO ASK
FOR ANYTHING FROM
YOU, BUT SIMPLY TO
SAY THANK YOU,
FOR ALL I HAVE.**

*Have you thanked God today
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- The freedoms we are able to enjoy
- Our educations and educators
- Doctors and medicines
- The avenue of prayer
- Those serving as elders/deacons
- Your Turn:



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Monthly Challenges

DIRECTIONS: *Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.*

1) PREPARE FOR OUR VBS

Mark 16:15 *"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.'"*

We have a Vacation Bible School coming up, starting on July 23, with the week's topic being "the Fruit of the Spirit." We want to examine how we can see those qualities in the life of Jesus and how we can produce them in our lives today. The success of any meeting depends greatly upon how much effort goes into it before it even starts. Some of the ways we can all take part are:

- a) invite friends
- b) invite family
- c) invite co-workers
- d) talk about it and invite people via Facebook or Twitter
- e) post flyers for the VBS up around the community
- f) if possible, adjust your work schedule to be able to attend each night
- g) leave invitations on tables at restaurants with the tip

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

Galatians 3:23-29

23 "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. **24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, **26** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. **27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."