

CHINA MISSION NEWSLETTER**MISSIONARY:**

Eugene F. Brzozowski

P.O. Box 1006

Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Telephone: 011-886-929-561-777

KAOHSIUNG -1 September 2018

Dear brethren:

The Great Commission is binding upon all disciples. Inasmuch as our Lord commanded that all new disciples were to be taught "to observe all that I commanded you," it follows that they would also be obligated to carry out the commission that had just been commanded. Of course, not all are able to go to another nation. That being said, we all can have a part in making disciples, commensurate with our God given talents and material wherewithal. "All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers* of miracles, are they?" (1 Corinthians 12:29). We can all do something in the furtherance of the gospel, and for many there is no lack of the ability to teach the gospel to one degree or another. Where we fail to do this, it is often not so much a lack of proficiency in teaching, as a lack of passion for souls.

It is encouraging to see the brothers and sisters here sharing the word of God in chat groups on the Net among themselves and with the lost. Within the group they ask questions, research biblical answers, share what they have learned, and forward lessons from brethren far and wide that have helped them. The Internet chat is a tool affording greater opportunity for communicating the Word, but it will never make obsolete the chat that takes place face-to-face during personal visitation.

Recently, a brother here sat with a man for two hours going through the Bible's teaching on baptism. Very typically, the man attempted rebuttal with the thief on the cross. Our brother pointed out that the thief had repented but could not render obedience in baptism because he was on a cross, also reminding him that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins while here on earth. He then pressed the point, "You are not on a cross, and Jesus has not pronounced your sins forgiven." Our brother's answers rest on the fact that this man has no extenuating circumstance upon which to make an appeal for an exception to the rule; he has come face-to-face with God's word, and is physically able to comply. "Contradicting" the word of God is to "repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:44-46). Any appeal for exception, by the way, concedes the rule. Furthermore, any pronouncement of exception would have to be made by the one possessing authority to forgive sins. Relying on anything less would be presumptuous and amount to arrogance.

More fundamentally, the thief did not need to be baptized any more than did Abraham

or Moses. The church had not yet been established, and baptism "in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins" had not yet been inaugurated. Moreover, it would be more than seven weeks following the thief's death before either the church or Christian baptism would be instituted (Acts 2).

Even if the thief-on-the-cross rebuttal were valid, I personally do not understand how those who use this as a rebuttal can consider the argument intellectually comforting without also offering valid alternative interpretations of the verses regarding baptism. Without doing so, they would have to necessarily conclude that the Bible contradicts itself. And most do not even attempt to give a *biblically reasoned* alternative explanation for the passages addressing baptism. What should also be disconcerting to them is that they are basing their argument (and therefore, their eternal destiny) on a negative that they cannot prove. Having to prove a negative in a debate most often puts one in an unenviable position. The thief on the cross is *their* proof text, therefore, it is *they* who are obligated to prove that the thief was not baptized, which they cannot successfully do. There was John's baptism at the time, which incidentally, was also for the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps the thief had been baptized by John and then became a backslider. I seriously doubt this was the case, but I would not risk an eternity in hell on something I cannot prove. Sadly, it is their confusion about the biblical concepts of salvation by faith and justification by works that spawns this error.

Your servant in Christ,

Eugene F. Brzozowski