

REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

(Part Three – series on Baptist Distinctives)

TEXT: Acts 2:41-47

INTRODUCTION: Adherence to the first distinctive of biblical authority dictates all the others. Especially is this true in the matter of a regenerate church membership. It cannot be denied that the early church admitted only saved people and lived holy lives in the fear of God.

Gradually a corruption in practice paralleled the inroads of false doctrine (e.g., infant baptism). The result was the emergence of a “mixed multitude” in the constituency of the church. With the dubious conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D., all outward persecution of the church ceased. Christianity became popular. People wanted to “join” the church for the wrong reasons. The tragic consequences of this practice continue to this day, and Baptists need to conscientiously re-examine this historic distinctive.

OUTLINE: The Bible has much to say on this subject, and we should evaluate our own practice as a church in light of it.

- I. **The Biblical Imperative of Regeneration** (John 3:7)
 - A. A once-and-for-all work of God (John 1:13)
 1. Living members
 2. Growing members (still imperfect)
 - B. The condition of faith/repentance (vv. 37, 44)
 - C. The character of regeneration ones (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18)
 1. The tests of First John
 2. The tension between the ideal and the actual (v. 47 “*were being saved*”)
- II. **The Church’s Responsibility to Maintain Purity** (Acts 5:11,13; Jude 4)
 - A. A realization of the church’s spiritual nature and destiny (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 3:4)
 1. “Body of Christ”
 2. “Building of God”
 3. “Bride of Christ”
 - B. An awareness of the ever-present threat of false doctrine and worldliness
 - C. A deterrent to “closet Christianity” (Mark 16:16)
 - D. A call to church discipline (1 Cor. 5:12,13)

III. Practical Concerns in Light of this Distinctive

- A.** Are we demanding a true public confession?
- B.** Are we adequately examining candidates for church membership?
- C.** Are we placing an overemphasis on numbers?
 - 1.** Membership
 - 2.** Attendance
 - 3.** “Decisions”
- D.** Are we advocating “easy believism” and mechanical soul-winning?

CONCLUSION: Baptists in America today seem reluctant to emphasize and enforce this distinctive of insisting on only a regenerate church membership. Failure to do so has resulted in a “mixed multitude” of both saved and unsaved people in our churches. Because we espouse a congregational [democratic] form of government, when the unregenerate members outnumber the regenerate, the mind of the Spirit will no longer be discerned in the voice of the local church.