

# REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

## (Part Four – series on Baptist Distinctives)

**TEXT:** Acts 2:41-47

**INTRODUCTION:** We have seen that if Jesus insisted on Nicodemus' being "born again" in order to enter the "kingdom of God," we should not allow someone to "join" the visible assembly of believers unless he gives evidence of having been truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The holding by Baptists of this tenet of a regenerate church membership combined with the conviction that baptism is for believers only truly distinguishes us from other Christian denominations that practice infant baptism.

By our insistence on a regenerate church membership, we are not saying that we accept only perfect people. The expression in Acts 2:47 "*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should [were being] saved*" suggests that the process of spiritual perfection (sanctification) only begins at the moment of salvation. While we desire to **open** the door of membership wide to all that are truly saved, however little their faith may be, we are compelled by Scripture to **guard** that door against worldly professors and false teachers. A true child of God is "alive" spiritually even if he is not yet mature. Dead members don't count!

**OUTLINE:** Let us note the biblical basis for this distinctive and then evaluate our practice in light of the Bible's teaching.

- 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:** Being a child of God is a “family affair.” It is a big deal. Both John the Baptist and Paul refused baptism to professors until they demonstrated works “*meet for repentance.*” We should jealously and zealously guard entrance to the visible church by insisting on the same criteria.

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.