

POWER

“. . . the gospel . . . is the power of God unto salvation . . .” (Romans 1:16)

THE ESSENTIALITY OF BAPTISM (PART 1)

by Wade L. Webster

The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is essential to salvation, yet, the majority of people within the religious world deny it. Some deny it directly by what they teach, while others deny it indirectly by what they do.

As you likely know, some see baptism as a human work whereby man tries to earn his own salvation. Those who hold this view of baptism see it as directly opposed to grace.

Others see baptism simply as an outward sign of an inward grace. Those who hold this view of baptism believe that salvation comes before baptism. They see baptism simply as a way to declare to the world that a person has already been saved.

It is common for those who hold this view of baptism to wait days, weeks, or months before baptizing candidates. After all, if salvation has already taken place, then there is no real urgency (Acts 16:33?).

Perhaps, the most common approach today is known as The Sinner's Prayer. According to this line of thinking, a man is saved simply by saying a short prayer acknowledging sin and asking Jesus to come into his heart to save him. Obviously, in such a plan, baptism is seen as non-essential.

Clearly, many are ignorant of what the Bible says about the essentiality of baptism. They are blind leaders of the blind (Mat. 15:14). Sadly, unless we open their eyes by reasoning with them from the Scriptures, they are going to fall into the ditch of eternal destruction. Out of love for their souls, let's examine the fundamental subject of baptism again.

Man Cannot Obey The Commandments Of God Without Being Baptized

The Apostle Peter “commanded” Cornelius and those of his household “to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). As you likely recall, Cornelius had been told to send for Peter who would tell him “words” whereby he and his house could be “saved” (Acts 11:14).

Clearly, the command to be baptized was a part of the saving words that Peter was to tell Cornelius. As you likely know, baptism was at the heart of the Great Commission that had been given to Peter and the other apostles. Having been given all authority (Mt. 28:18), Jesus commanded the apostles to teach all nations, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt. 28:19-20). Please note the connection between the authority of Christ and baptism. This same connection was made by Peter at Cornelius' house. Cornelius and those of his household were to be baptized “in the name of” or by the authority of “the Lord” (Acts 10:48; cf. 8:12; Col. 3:17).

Since baptism is a commandment of God, man cannot obey God without doing it. It should be noted that Jesus was baptized to “fulfill all righteousness” (Mat. 3:15). Unlike us, Jesus didn't have any sins to wash away (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). However, He did have to be baptized in order to fulfill or to keep all of the commandments of God (Psa. 119:172). As you recall, God had

commanded baptism through John (Mat. 21:25). Jesus submitted to John's baptism, but the Jewish leaders did not.

Eventually, Jesus would call the Jewish leaders to give an account for this. He asked them, “The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?” (Mat 21:25). Had Jesus not submitted to John's baptism, the Jewish leaders could have deflected His argument back on Him. However, as it stood, they were placed on the horns of a dilemma (Mat. 21:25).

If they said that John's baptism was from heaven, they were condemning themselves for not having submitted to it (Mat. 21:25). However, if they said that John's baptism was of men, then they would anger the people who held John to be a prophet (Mat. 21:26). Therefore, the Jewish leaders simply answered, “We cannot tell.”

Like these Jewish leaders, those who deny the essentiality of baptism today are left without an answer. Perhaps, like the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day, they deny the essentiality of baptism because they see it as a command from men, rather than as a command from heaven.

However, the Bible makes clear the command to be baptized is from heaven. It is commanded in the name of Jesus (Acts 10:48). It has the full authority of Christ behind it (Mat. 28:18). Those who reject Christ's commandment to be baptized will one day be rejected by Him (John 12:48; Rev. 22:15).

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Man Cannot See Or Enter The Kingdom Of God Without Being Baptized

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and expressed his belief that Jesus was from God, “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5). “Except” means unless. Unless a man is born again, of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see/enter the kingdom of God.

To be born of water and of the Spirit is the equivalent of being sanctified and cleansed with “the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). The expression “washing of water” is the equivalent of being “born of water” and the expression “by the word” is the equivalent of being born “of the Spirit.” The “washing of water” (Eph. 5:26) has reference to baptism in water for the remission of sins (Acts 8:36, 38-39; 22:16). “By the word” (Eph. 5:26) has reference to the operation of the Holy Spirit through the word upon the human heart (Eph. 6:17; Acts 2:37). It is through the word that the Holy Spirit commands men to be baptized.

Peter declared, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Please note that we are “born again” when we obey the truth

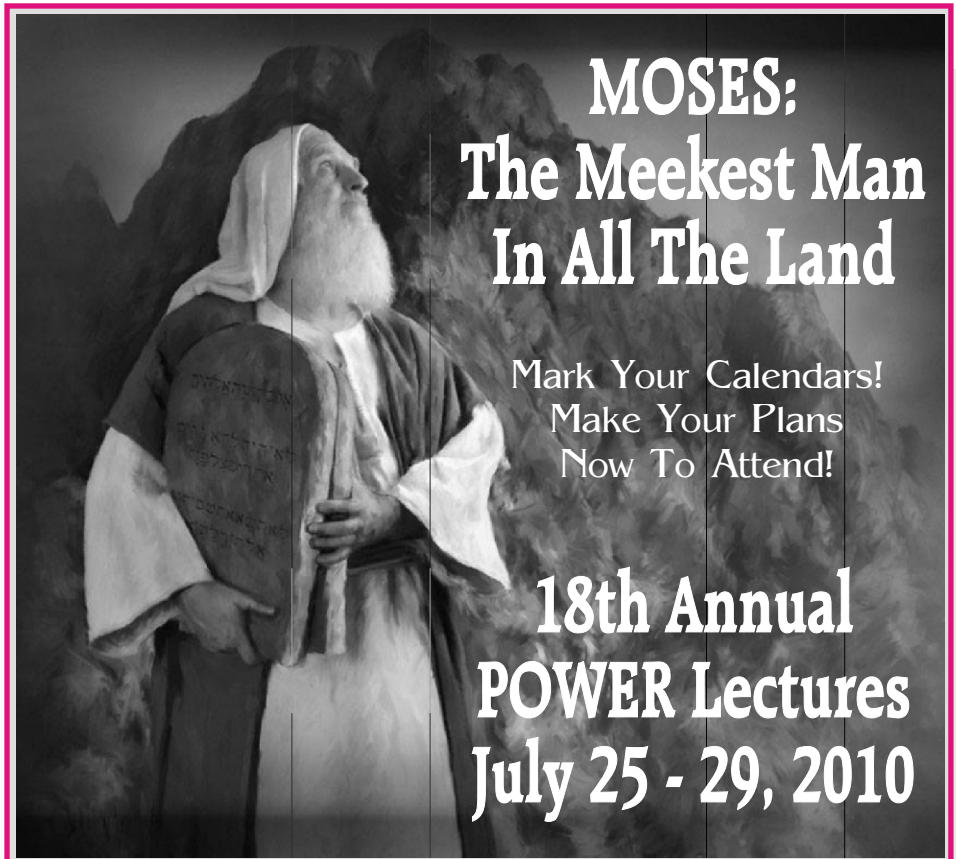
through the Spirit. It is by the one “Spirit” that we are “all baptized” into the one body (1 Cor. 12:13). It is in the act of baptism that we are “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Clearly, those at Corinth had been born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). They had been cleansed with the washing of water by the word (Eph. 5:26).

Later, in writing to Titus, Paul declared that we are saved according to God's mercy, “by the washing of regeneration” and the “renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). Please notice again the references to “washing,” “regen-eration,” “renewing,” and “the Holy Ghost.” Here, we have another parallel to being “born again” “of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:3, 5). Man

becomes a “new creature” when he is “baptized into” Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27). At baptism, “old things” pass away and “all things” become “new.”

Furthermore, at baptism, we are “delivered...from the power of darkness” and “translated...into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13-14). Sadly, some quibble that the water mentioned in Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus was the water of natural child birth. However, to argue this is to make the same mistake that Nicodemus made (John 3:4, 9-10). It is to confuse the spiritual with the physical. Jesus made clear that he was not speaking of that which was “born of the flesh” (John 3:6), but rather, that which was “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6).

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Man Cannot Have The Remission Of Sins Without Being Baptized

When those pricked on Pentecost cried out asking what they should do to be saved, Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Please note that they were to be "baptized" in the name of or by the authority of Jesus Christ. The purpose of baptism was "the remission of sins." They were being baptized "for," or in order that, their sins might be removed. To avoid the clear thrust of the text, some argue that the word "for" means because of. They argue that those on Pentecost were baptized because of the remission of their sins. In other words, they were being baptized because their sins had already been taken away. Thus, baptism was merely an outward sign of an inward grace. However, this argument will not stand the test of Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21)

In instituting the Lord's Supper, Jesus used the exact expression that was used by Peter on Pentecost. He declared, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mat. 26:28). Please note that Jesus' blood was shed "for the remission of sins." What does the little word "for" mean in this passage?

Does it mean in order that or because of? Did Jesus shed His blood in order that sins might be removed or because of the removal of sins? Obviously, Jesus shed his blood in order that sins might be removed. If sins had already been removed, then there would have been no reason for Jesus to shed His blood. Yet, we know that His death was necessary. After all, the blood of bulls and goats

could not take away sins (Heb. 10:4).

We know that there was no other way for sins to be removed (Mat. 26:39; Heb. 5:7-9). If there had been another way, God would have given it to His beloved Son. Today, there is no other way than baptism for man's sins to be removed. It is in baptism that man contacts the blood of Jesus which was shed for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:3-4; John 19:32-34). It is for this reason that Saul of Tarsus was told to "arise, and be baptized, and wash away" his sins (Acts 22:16; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Although Saul addressed Jesus as Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:8, 10), and evidently prayed for three days upon arriving in the city (Acts 9:9, 11), he was still in his sins until he was baptized (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Of course, the same holds true for men today. Until a man is baptized, his sins have not been washed away.

Man Cannot Get Into Christ Without Being Baptized

To the saints at Galatia, Paul wrote, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). The saints at Galatia were "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." However, please note that they were not children by faith alone.

Faith alone cannot save (Jam. 2:14-26). It is not enough to say, "Lord, Lord" (Mt. 7:21-22), man must do the will of the Father. Those at Galatia were children of God by faith, but not by faith alone. They had "been baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27). In fact, baptism was how they had gotten into Christ. Furthermore,

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Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

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baptism was how they were all “one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13). In Christ, they enjoyed “all spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3; cf. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:1), including “the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7).

Sadly, many want the blessings that are “in Christ” without doing what is necessary to get “into” Him. For example, they want “the forgiveness of sins” without being baptized. They want to enjoy the blessings found on the inside while remaining on the outside. However, this cannot be done. Those who want to be “in Christ” and enjoy the blessings that are found there must be baptized into Him. There simply is

no other way to get into Christ or the benefits of His death (Rom. 6:3-4). It is interesting to note that faith, repentance, and confession are said to be “unto” salvation (Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 11:18). However, the language changes from “unto” to “into” with baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). Baptism is the entryway into Christ.

In this study, we have seen four clear reasons why baptism is essential to salvation. For sure, we have but touched the hem of the garment. Lord willing, in the next installment of this study, we will notice additional reasons why men must be baptized. The evidence for the essentiality of baptism is simply overwhelming.

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