

To Those Who Do Not Believe Baptism Saves

By Kent Heaton

The answer to what a person must do to be saved should be a clear and concise conclusion to all who read the revealed word of God. John reminds us the commandments of God are not hard to understand nor burdensome to keep (1John 5:3). From Genesis to Revelation the mind of God unfolds the plan of redemption for man in printed form “by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4) as Paul exhorted the saints in Ephesus. Obedience comes from a heart that follows the “form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17) setting us free from sin (Rom. 6:22). The book of Acts is filled with stories of early disciples who heard and understood the word of God and “gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41); “went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:38); “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12); “and immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). In every story of the new birth baptism is part of the plan for redeeming man. With an overwhelming body of evidence of the place baptism has in the essential character of salvation, why do so many reject its need?

When the earliest dawns cast their shadows upon a new earth, Adam and Eve walked in communion with the Lord. Satan would not be content with this peace and came to Eve to deceive her into rejecting the word of God. He did not force her to take of the forbidden fruit nor coerce her will to do his bidding but he used the deceptive speech of a liar and attacks the simple command of God. Of all the trees in the garden she could eat of every tree save one. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The simplicity of the command was the advantage Satan used against Eve. If the command of God was complex and hard to understand it would have been more difficult for Satan to deceive her. “Has God indeed said” (Gen. 3:1) is how the devil deceived the woman into looking at the simple law of God and question if that was really fair. She knew the law and she understood the law. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6).

Sin is a transgression of God’s law (1John 3:4). The rebellion against the word of God is always at the price of refusing to follow the clearly defined will of God. The Lord has never asked of any man to do more than he could do. Abraham was told to offer Isaac as a burnt offering (Gen. 22) as a test but he was not being asked to do anything that he could not do. “By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17). How difficult was the command to offer Isaac (v2)? Abraham clearly understood the terms the Lord had laid down “so Abraham rose early in the morning ... and went to the place of which God had told him” (Gen. 22:3). The Father asked His only begotten Son to become a sacrifice for all men and Jesus “learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Today Satan tickles the ears of men as he whispers, ‘Has God indeed said you must be baptized to be saved?’ Few in the religious world believe that baptism is essential for salvation. The ‘Standard Manual for Baptist Churches’ (Hiscox) says “Baptism is not essential to salvation, for our churches utterly repudiate the dogma of ‘baptismal regeneration;’ but it is essential to obedience, since Christ commanded it” (pp20-21). It is difficult to understand how something can be essential for obedience but not essential for salvation. Yet this illustrates a common view held by many that baptism is not essential for redemption in Christ. When Satan succeeds in drawing the hearts of men away from the simple command of God he has gained the victory of deception that leads to rebellion against the Lord.

Christ commanded baptism in two ways. First, He became the pattern of baptism by His own immersion. "And John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he allowed Him" (Matt. 3:14-15). Second, He told His disciples to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Mark writes, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Luke unveils the plan of God to have the gospel of salvation begin in Jerusalem preaching "repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47). He further unfolds the fulfillment of this command in his letter to Theophilus of the Acts of the Apostles.

Peter preached baptism in Acts 2 & 3 and later with the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. Ananias exhorted Saul of Tarsus to "arise and be baptized and wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16; 9:1-18). Philip baptized men and women in Acts 8:12 and took the man from Ethiopia into the water and baptized him (Acts 8:38). Paul baptized and taught the necessity of baptism in all of his preaching. Writing to the Romans he shows how that baptism is the death, burial and resurrection "just as Christ was raised from the dead" (Rom. 6:4). To the Galatians he proclaimed, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The saints at Colossae learned that baptism is like a spiritual circumcision (Col. 2:11-12). Peter affirmed that baptism saves in 1Peter 3:21.

The essential nature of baptism does not void salvation by grace (Eph. 2:1-9) or the love of God (John 3:16) and will not diminish the mercy of God (1Peter 1:3). Obedience is characterized by doing all the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). Salvation comes from faith and works (James 2:14-26). As a part of the wonderful plan of saving man baptism is where the blood of Christ washes away our sins (Matt. 26:28; John 19:34; Rom. 6:3-4). Baptism is indispensable, required, compulsory, necessary and essential to the saving of the soul. The Holy Spirit revealed it, Jesus commanded it, the disciples followed it and the Father demands it. How can I deny the word of God? Can it be that a simple command of faith has become a stumbling block of Satan to keep one from Heaven? "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29).