

Life's Little Lessons VIII

By Paul R. Blake

More Bible questions: One visitor to our website asked the following question: "Will God save a person who has faith in Christ as his personal Savior but has never been baptized?"

Answer: Mark 16:16 - "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Did Jesus make baptism necessary for salvation? What are the conditions for salvation in this text? Believe and be baptized. The argument has been made that Jesus didn't restate baptism in the second part of His statement; therefore, baptism is not a necessary condition for salvation. This is neither sound nor logical reasoning. When one states two conditions of a desired result and one of the conditions has not been met, it is not necessary to restate both conditions in the negative. The loss of a single condition is sufficient to void the desired result.

Consider the following illustration: A young boy is told to behave all evening and take his bath; and if he does, he will be permitted to go to the carnival tomorrow. It is easy to understand that he needs to do both in order to go to the carnival. If he doesn't behave, he doesn't get to go; it doesn't matter at that point whether he takes his bath or not. If he does not take his bath, he will not get to go; it doesn't matter that he behaved. We understand that based on the instructions, he had to do both. Leave either condition out and the conditions for going to the carnival have not been met.

Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16) The Divine Son of God put two conditions in that statement: believe and be baptized. Leave belief out of the statement, and it doesn't matter whether one is baptized. Leave baptism out of Jesus statement, and it doesn't matter whether one believes. Both conditions must be met if one wants to meet the conditions Jesus set for salvation. I recommend doing what Jesus said without modification. Thank you for your question. I hope this helps.

A young evangelist sent the following question by email: I'd like to know all your thoughts and information about what is meant when Jesus was on the cross and said "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me." I hear it said a lot that God at that point had to turn His back on Jesus because He "became sin" and "took our sins on Himself. I personally don't think that might have been the case or meaning of Jesus saying that. I could be wrong. I'd like your help in studying this. Thanks in advance!

Answer: I will not diminish the cry of our Lord by trying to re-explain it as an intellectual exercise in which He tries to make sure He has check-listed all of the Old Testament prophecies about Him. I believe that just as He was pleading intensely and emotionally in the Garden to avoid the cross, so also He was feeling intensely alone and expressing those feelings on the cross. The fact that the Psalmists by inspiration expressed their emotions, fears, and doubts to God does not mean that they lost their faith; it means that they were overwhelmed with fear and sorrow and were pleading for help. So also, the fact that Jesus cried out "Why have You forsaken Me?" speaks to how much He was suffering, not whether God had actually left him.

It must be understood that as the sacrifice for sin and as the One who was carrying the burden of our sin, God had to abandon Jesus to that fate. In as much as the Passover lamb is given over to death, and the scapegoat is chased off into the wilderness are both forsaken, so Jesus as the Passover lamb and scapegoat Who carried our sins had to be abandoned to die and sent away. That is Biblical.

I do not subscribe to the two contemporary schools of thought that intellectualize the temptations and emotions of Jesus, or who impose their personal paradigm of Jesus over what is written. Prayer is supposed to be an intensely honest and emotionally invested activity. To pretend to pray to God about being forsaken on the cross without wrestling with the feeling of

being forsaken is dishonest. It is up to us to learn why He said it without preconceived notions of who we think Jesus is. I hope this helps.

Mercy and Forgiveness **By Kent Heaton**

“I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I am the Lord their God, and I will hear them” (Zech. 10:6).

It is very clear when reading the books of the prophets the Lord is angry with His people. Whether prior to captivity or after captivity, the fierce judgment of God is rendered upon a rebellious people refusing to repent. In the early days of the divided kingdom, God’s messengers pleaded with the people to change their hearts. The northern kingdom Israel went into complete revolt against the Lord and was destroyed by the Assyrians. During that time, God warned Judah to see what was happening to her sister Israel and change her ways. There were good years of righteousness intermingled among the wicked and eventually Judah fell to the might of the Babylonians who took them captive. Seventy years later the people return to rebuild their nation. As before the bondage, prophets warned the people against turning away from the Lord. The fierceness of the wrath of God was clearly portrayed in their history and would be brought against them again if they fail to obey. All nations who came against the people of God felt the power of the Almighty’s wrath.

Zechariah was a prophet during the days of restoration following captivity. He begins his message with the warning the Lord was angry with their fathers and they should not follow their disobedience. There is great hope in the promise of God’s love for the people and that He will save them. His mercy will be evident in forgiving them of their sins and embracing them once again. The Lord tells them He will have mercy on them and this mercy will be so great it will be as though nothing had happened against them. Reading the history of Israel it seems hard to think a day would come the nation would forget all the misery and horror that was their burden. The punishment of the Lord was immense. Their sin was so grievous and the hand of the Lord was so hard against them. Mercy brings forgiveness. The joy of being a child of God is to know His mercy removes the guilt of sin completely. It is as if sin had never been committed.

There is a path to salvation. Sin mars the relationship with God separating man from Him. In the infinite mercy of God, a way of escape is offered. Man turns his heart to God in repentance and the mercy of the Lord God removes the sin as far as the east is from the west. When forgiveness is granted, it is as if the rebellion never occurred. Man stands whole before the Lord unstained by the ugliness of sin. The mercy of God is so unbelievable to think He would take away the sin and its guilt so complete He looks at it as if it never happened. Forgiveness is complete. It is gone forever. There is no record of the sin. Washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

In the mind of God, there is no remembrance to forgiven sin. The mercy of God is hard to understand but His promise is true in Jesus Christ that if we confess our sins He is willing and just to forgive our sins. This means it does not exist. The forgiven shall be as though He had not cast them aside. Understanding the mercy of God is to know that in forgiveness He remains our Father, our Lord and our Savior. He hears us. Mercy means that God hears us. We are not downtrodden or forgotten. The Lord God has forgiven our sins and we are blessed with the merciful grace of His love. Thank God for His mercy and His forgiveness.