

Understanding The Difference Between Works And Conditions *by* David Cambridge
UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKS AND CONDITIONS
The Relationship Between Grace And Obedience

Introduction

1. Acts 2:1-47 records the first gospel sermon and reveals what man must do to be saved. When those gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost heard and believed the gospel, they cried out, “men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter gave them heaven’s answer: “...Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”. This is in alignment with Jesus’ commission (Mark 16:15-16).
2. While people accept that one must hear the gospel, believe the gospel, repent of sin, and confess that Jesus is Lord, they often refuse to accept that one must take that final step and be baptised for the remission of sins. So we will spend some time explaining the reason for this refusal, and show you how you can help people to understand the purpose of Christian baptism.

I. HEAVEN’S ANSWER TO THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION ANYONE CAN ASK

A. What shall we do?

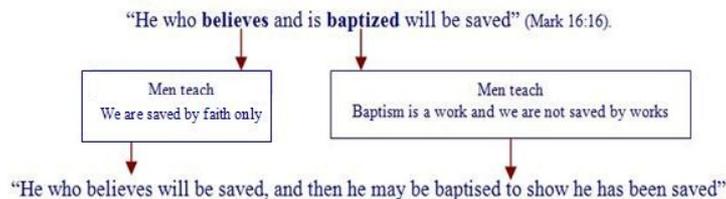
1. The most important question that anyone can ask is the one that was asked of the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost: Peter had just preached the gospel to thousands of Jews, and he concluded by saying, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The Jews who believed the gospel, those who were pricked in their hearts, then asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).
2. The apostle Peter (who had just been filled with the Holy Spirit - Acts 2:1-4) gave heaven’s answer to these believers: “**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 2:38). This answer is consistent with the commission Jesus gave to the apostles: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned**” (Mark 16:15-16).

B. The reaction of the people of that day:

1. Peter gave the people heaven’s answer and 3000 of those who believed were baptized (Acts 2:41).
2. It is those who obey the gospel that are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

C. The reaction of people today to this teaching:

1. In presenting these same truths, people usually respond by exclaiming, “We are saved by faith only!”, or, “Baptism is a work and you cannot be saved by works!”, or, “Baptism is not for the forgiveness of sins!”. Such statements contradict what Jesus said (“He who **believes and is baptized** will be saved” - Mark 16:16), and what the Holy Spirit (through the apostle Peter) told believers they must do (“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**” – Acts 2:38). One is astonished at the readiness of some to deny the clear and plain teaching of Scripture.
2. The difficulty some have is in reconciling the teaching of the inspired word of God with the uninspired teaching of men. The chart below shows how some people change the clear and plain teaching of Jesus’ words to fit their own theology:



3. There is, though, no need to tamper with the Scriptures. The basic error is in *assuming* that we are saved by faith alone¹ and that baptism is a meritorious work, i.e., a work whereby one earns his salvation. The following account from the book of Kings will help us to understand that baptism, far from being a meritorious work, is the condition upon which a person's sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. A person's sins have to be washed away at some point, and that point is at the point of our obedience (cp. **Hebrews 5:9**).

II. SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

- A. The following example is in connection with "*salvation*" from a physical ailment, but the principle is true concerning our salvation from sin. Read 2 Kings 5:1-14.

1. Naaman, healed by the grace of God:

- a. Naaman was the captain of the army of the king of Aram, a great man and highly respected. But he had leprosy (**2 Kings 5:1**).
- b. Hearing that there was a prophet in Israel who might cure him, he received permission from his master to go there and seek out the prophet (**2 Kings 5:2-5**).
- c. So Naaman came to the house of Elisha and he was instructed to, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean" (**2 Kings 5:9:11**).
- d. But having received this simple instruction, Naaman became angry and refused because, he said, "Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper" (**2 Kings 5:11**).
- e. Naaman would have returned home but for his servants who persuaded him saying, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (**2 Kings 5:13**).
- f. Having listened to his servants, Naaman went down and dipped himself in the river seven times and was healed of his leprosy (**2 Kings 5:14**).

2. Everyone would agree that it was God who healed Naaman of his leprosy (see **2 Kings 5:15**). But was Naaman healed by the grace of God or did Naaman earn his healing by obeying the instruction to dip himself seven times in the river Jordan? Any intelligent student will perceive that Naaman was healed by the grace of God. We could say that **Naaman was saved by grace through faith**. When Naaman dipped himself in the river, he was not *earning* his healing; it was simply the point at which God chose to heal him of his leprosy.

Naaman was instructed to dip seven times in the river to be cleansed of his leprosy. He obeyed and was cleansed by the grace of God. Naaman's dipping seven times in the river was essential; it was not a meritorious work, it was a condition. It was at the point of his obedience that God cleansed him.

- B. There are many other examples of healings, deliverances, and victories that can all be attributed to the grace of God. But we must understand (speaking now of our salvation from sin)...

1. We are saved by grace, but this grace comes through obedient faith.
2. To say that any act of obedience is a work by which we earn salvation is contrary to the scriptures:
"So you too, when you have done all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; **we have done only that which we ought to have done**'" (**Luke 17:10**).
3. Jesus said that the one who believes and is baptized shall be saved (**Mark 16:16**), and so this is what we believe and teach.

¹ The Scriptures teach we are saved by faith, but it is men that have added the word "only". Since the word "only" means that everything else is excluded, it would exclude repentance (See Acts 2:38). Some also teach that we are saved by grace "alone", but, again, that would exclude all else; even faith! If a person were saved by grace alone, then no one would be lost. Do we not know that it is a serious matter to add or take away from God's word (Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19)?

III. THE OBEDIENCE BY WHICH WE BECOME BENEFICIARIES OF GOD'S GRACE

- A. Paul says that we are God's workmanship, **created** in Christ Jesus for good works (**Ephesians 2:10a**).
1. Physically, we are the creation of God (**Psalms 100:3**). However, it is our spiritual creation in Christ Jesus that is in view here.
"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).
 2. If one is a new creation then he must be in Christ, and only those in Christ are **saved** (**Acts 4:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:10**).
"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for **obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ**" (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**).
"And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to **salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**" (**2 Timothy 3:15**).
- B. All spiritual blessings are **in Christ** (**Ephesians 1:3**), and this includes our **salvation by grace**:
"**In Him** we have **redemption** through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His **grace**" (**Ephesians 1:7**).
1. It is essential to see in this verse that, it is **in Christ** that we are saved by the blood of Christ.
 2. Note too, it is **in Him** that we have redemption **according to the riches of God's grace**, i.e., only those **in Christ** are the beneficiaries of God's grace.
- C. It is in Christ that we become beneficiaries of God's grace; it is in Christ that we are said to be a new creation; and it is in Christ that we have salvation. It is essential, then, that we ensure that we are in Christ.
1. The following verses demonstrate:
 - a. We get into Christ by being baptized into Christ:
"For all of you who were **baptized into Christ** have clothed yourselves with Christ" (**Galatians 3:27; cp. Romans 6:3**).
 - b. We become a new creation when we are baptized into Christ:
"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in **newness of life**" (**Romans 6:4**).
"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**).
 - c. We are saved from our sins by God's grace and mercy by being baptized:
"**He saved us**, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (**Titus 3:5**).
 2. This is in perfect accord with other passages that refer to baptism (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21**).

Summary

1. The most important question anyone who has come to believe the gospel can ask is, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer of the Holy Spirit is, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**).
2. Many people read the Holy Spirit's answer and reject it! This is usually because it conflicts with the false teaching of men, which says (i) We are saved by faith only, and (ii) baptism is a meritorious work.
 - a. Are we saved by faith only? James argues "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder!" (**James 2:19**).

b. Is baptism a meritorious work? Paul says, “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7). Note very carefully: Paul begins by denying that one is saved by works of righteousness, and then he tells us how one is saved: “according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”. Commentators agree that the “washing of regeneration” is a reference to baptism. Men like to refer to baptism as a work of righteousness, but Paul denies it.

3. Rather than changing the clear teaching of Scripture to fit the teaching of men, we must seek to harmonize all the teaching of Scripture. **If we can understand that Naaman was healed of his leprosy by God’s grace when he believed and dipped himself in the Jordan River, then we can understand how one is forgiven of sins by the grace of God by believing the gospel and being immersed in water.** It is at the point of obedience that one is cleansed (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; cp. Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:20-21).

“What must I do to be saved?” If you believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and this question is on your lips today, then heaven’s answer is...

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).