

# POWER

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

## THE ESSENTIALITY OF BAPTISM (PART 2) *by Wade L. Webster*

**A**s we noted in the last installment of this study, the majority of the religious world denies that baptism is essential to salvation. However, the teaching of Scripture is clear. Our cry must be that of Paul, “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). In the last installment of this study, we considered four reasons why men must be baptized. For sure, these four reasons are sufficient for the good and honest heart. However, we are going to continue to consider additional reasons in hope that hearts might yet be softened and saved.

### **Man Cannot Be Saved Without Being Baptized**

Having discussed the flood of Noah's day and the eight souls that were “saved by water” (1 Pet. 3:20), Peter declared, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 3:21). The “like figure” in the context is the salvation of Noah and his family. Noah and his family were “saved by water” (1 Pet. 3:20). Water bore up the ark and delivered Noah and his family from condemnation. In like manner, men today are saved from condemnation by baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 8:1).

Peter's argument is clear, isn't it? Baptism saves. Examine closely the exact wording: “Baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21). Please note that Peter didn't say that baptism declares us to be saved. Baptism is not an outward expression of an inward grace as some teach. Baptism

is rather an essential prerequisite to salvation. We are baptized in order to be saved, and not because we have already been saved.

In giving the Great Commission, Jesus declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). Please note that both belief and baptism precede salvation. Jesus did NOT say, “He that believeth and is saved shall be baptized.” Yet, this is what many in the religious world teach. Salvation does not come before baptism. It comes after it. As you likely know, some argue from the last part of Jesus' statement that failing to believe is what damns a man, and not failing to be baptized (Mk. 16:16). However, this is a perversion of what Jesus said. In the first part of the passage, Jesus clearly taught that those who want to be saved must believe and be baptized. He did not turn around then in the second part of the passage and argue against what he had just declared. If a man must believe and be baptized to be saved, and Jesus clearly declared that he must (Mk. 16:16), then any man who fails to do either of these things will be damned. There is simply no other option.

Furthermore, please note in the passage from Peter that baptism is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh” (1 Pet. 3:21). If it is “not” this, then what is it? As already noted in the first part of this study, baptism is the putting away or the washing away of sin. Ananias told Saul, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16; cf. 2:38). Baptism saves us because it puts

away our sins (1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 22:16).

Finally, please consider in the passage from First Peter that baptism is described as “the answer” of “a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet. 3:21). You may recall that Peter gave baptism as the answer to those on Pentecost who were “pricked” in their hearts by the preaching of the gospel. When they cried out asking what they needed to do to be saved (Acts 2:37), he told them to “repent” and to “be baptized” by the authority of Jesus “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The hearts and/or consciences of those on Pentecost were not past feeling. Their consciences had not been “seared” as with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2). The word of God was able to prick their hearts. By day's end, about 3,000 gave “the answer” of a good conscience by being baptized (1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 2:41).

In the ninth chapter of Acts, we again see that baptism is the answer of a good conscience. It was the answer that Saul was instructed by Ananias to give (Acts 9:6, 18). Ananias declared, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Please note that Saul, who had been kicking “against the pricks (Act 9:6), gave the answer of a good conscience by being baptized (Acts 22:16). Baptism was how he called on the name of the Lord.

Sometimes I use a telephone call to illustrate and explain what it means to call on the name of the Lord. If you want to call someone on the telephone, three things are essential. First, you must have the right number. If you do not have the right number, you will

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never reach the person that you intend to call. In like manner, in calling on God, a person must use the right number. To call upon God, a person must hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believe that Christ is the Son of God (John 3:16), repent of their sins (Lk. 13:3, 5), confess their faith before men (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). This is the right number because it is the number that is found in God's word. Numbers that are found in the creeds, manuals, and disciplines of men will not work. Second, you must use the whole number. If a single numeral is left out in placing a call, the call will not go through. In like manner, in calling on God, a person cannot leave baptism or anything else out and hope to reach God. As Brother Marshall Keeble used to say, "There is water in the plan." Third, you must use the whole number in the right order. If you reverse the numbers in placing a call, you will not reach the person that you are intending to call. In like manner, in calling on God, a person cannot shift the order of God's plan around. As noted above in our discussion of Mark 16:16, a person cannot put salvation before baptism and hope to reach God. This is not the order that God has given in His word (Mk. 16:16). Baptism precedes salvation in God's plan.

## **Man Cannot Follow The Cases Of Conversion Without Being Baptized**

Beginning in the second chapter of the book of Acts, Luke records multiple cases of conversion. No doubt, these cases of conversion are recorded to show us what is essential to salvation. It is hard to understand how anyone could read these cases of conversion and arrive at any conclusion other than that baptism is essential to salvation. Please consider the cases of conversion with me:

• **The 3,000 on Pentecost (Acts 2)**  
- When those on the day of Pentecost

cried out asking what they could 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 Peter joined repentance and baptism together. It is amazing to me that many in the religious world stress the essentiality of repentance, but not the essentiality of baptism. They argue that repentance is required, but that baptism is optional. However, the conjunction "and" joins things of equal rank and value. Repentance is not more important than baptism; nor, is baptism more important than repentance. Both are essential to salvation. Repentance and baptism have been "joined together" by God and must not be "put asunder" by man (Mt. 19:6). Clearly, those who cried out on Pentecost understood the

essentiality of baptism. After all, those who gladly received "his word" or answer "were baptized" (Acts 2:41). As already noted in earlier discussions in this study, they were baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). They knew that they had to be baptized in order for their sins to be forgiven.

• **Those in Samaria, including Simon (Acts 8)** - Those who "believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ...were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Please note also that a sorcerer name Simon "believed" and was "baptized (Act 8:13). Did you catch the steps and the sequence in each of these statements? They believed and were baptized. As you recall, these were the very instructions that Jesus gave in giving the Great Commission. He declared, "He that believeth and is

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baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16). The conclusion is clear. Those in Samaria who believed and were baptized were saved.

• **The treasurer of Queen Candace (Acts 8)** - When Philip “preached” Jesus unto the queen’s treasurer (Acts 8:35), he saw water and wanted to be baptized (Acts 8:36). It seems clear that preaching Jesus included preaching baptism. When the eunuch confessed, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” Philip “baptized him” (Acts 8:38). Please note again the steps and sequence. The treasurer of Queen Candace believed and was baptized. Again, we see the plan that Jesus gave (Mk. 16:16).

• **Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9: 22)** - On the road to Damascus, Saul asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). In response to his question, the Lord said, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6). Please note that Saul was going to be told what he “must” do. The little word “must” is extremely important to our study. After all, the word “must” is used to stress that which is essential. In the city, Saul was told to “arise, and be baptized” (Acts 22:16; cf. 9:18). Baptism was clearly a “must do” (cf. John 3:3, 5). It remains so for us today.

• **A centurion named Cornelius and his household (Acts 10)** - In a vision, Cornelius was told to send to Joppa for Simon Peter, who would tell him what he “oughtest to do” (Acts 10:1-6, 22, 32-33; 11:14). The context of Cornelius’ conversion concludes with Peter commanding Cornelius and his household “to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47-48). Clearly, baptism was what Cornelius and his household needed to or “oughtest” to do to be saved (Acts 10:6; 11:14). It is worthy to note that the expression “shall be saved” is found in the context of Cornelius’ salvation (Acts 11:14). These are the very words that our Lord used in

connection with baptism in giving the Great Commission. He declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16). Cornelius and his household were saved when they believed and were baptized.

• **A seller of purple from Thyatira named Lydia (Acts 16)** - Luke records that Lydia “attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” and “was baptized” (Acts 16:14-15). Clearly, baptism was a part of her conversion and the conversion of her household. It is interesting to note that following her baptism, Lydia besought Paul and Silas, saying, “If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there” (Acts 16:15). How do you think that Paul judged her? Did he judge her to be faithful or unfaithful? Clearly, he judged her to be faithful. After all, he entered into her house (Acts 16:40). She was faithful because she had done what was required of her. She and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Those who want to be judged as faithful to the Lord today must do the same (Mk. 16:16).

• **The keeper of the prison at Philippi (Acts 16)** - Having nearly taken his own life in fear that the prisoners had escaped, the keeper of the prison brought Paul and Silas out, and asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Many argue from Paul and Silas’ answer that baptism was not required for the jailor’s salvation. However, such is not the case. Paul and Silas didn’t tell the jailer something different than the Lord did in giving the Great Commission. As already noted several times in this study, Jesus declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:16). As we read further in the record of the jailer’s conversion, we find that

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“he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:33). Please note that the jailor believed and was baptized. This is exactly what Jesus commanded (Mk. 16:16). Furthermore, please consider the hour at which he was baptized. It was evidently sometime after midnight and before daylight (Acts 16:25, 33). Why was he baptized “the same hour of the night,” unless it was essential to his salvation? Why not wait like men do today for weeks or months before being baptized? The answer is clearly that baptism is a pivotal part of being saved.

• **Crispus, the chief ruler of the**

**synagogue, and many of the Corinthians (Acts 18:8)** - Granted, we are not given many details about the conversion of Crispus or the Corinthians. However, in the few details that we are given, we are told that they heard, “believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Again, it bears repeating that they did exactly what was commanded by Christ in giving the Great Commission (Mk. 16:16).

How could it be any clearer than Luke makes it in the book of Acts? Those who want to be saved must be baptized. The conversions of the book of Acts cannot be followed without doing so.

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