

Rom. 14:19
So then let
us follow
after things
which make
for peace,
and things
whereby
we may
edify one
another.

John 8:32 And
ye shall know
the truth and
the truth shall
make you free.

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BAPTISM AND EPHESIANS 2:8,9

by Andrew Richardson

Contrary to majority view, baptism is absolutely necessary for receiving salvation just as is faith and repentance (**Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Gal. 3:27**). However, that which Paul penned in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, perhaps more than any other passage, is cited as proof that we are saved without baptism. It is said that baptism cannot be a necessity because Paul says salvation is not “of works” and “not of yourselves.” In reality, when rightly understood, Paul’s point has no relevance to the requirement of baptism for salvation.

CONTEXT

Paul is speaking about what salvation is based upon—the grace of God through the blood of Christ. He is emphasizing God’s great love and mercy by reminding the Christians at Ephesus that though they were once lost in their sins, being “*dead*” (**vss. 1, 5**), they were saved by God’s grace (**v. 8**). Nothing is clearer in the Bible than that our redemption is rooted in the sacrifice of Christ. He shed His blood “*for the remission of sins*” (**Matt. 26:28**). This is God’s magnificent grace, that while men in their unrighteousness are unworthy of His goodness, Jesus still yet “*died for the ungodly*” (**Rom. 5:6**).

So, when Paul tells the Ephesus church their salvation is “*by grace*” and “*not of works*”, he’s saying they did not **earn** their redemption by their works. They could not “boast” as if they, instead of God, made it possible to be saved. *Earn* is the key word here. God did not owe it to them. Neither does He owe it to us. But by no means is Paul talking about performing a work required as a **condition** for receiving forgiveness. Baptism is essential, but not because a man earns eternal life by it, but simply because God chose it to be a condition (as is faith and repentance) we must meet. Man’s adherence to baptism does not make the death of Christ meaningless; neither does it somehow bypass His grace. Yes, the Lord’s death and the shedding of His blood **is the means** of forgiveness, but baptism is a condition for receiving it. God has determined that

baptism puts one “*into [Christ’s] death*” (**Rom. 6:4**) and “*into Christ*” (**Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27**).

Let’s be clear: those who reject baptism as a necessary work for salvation reject it on the basis that salvation is not earned by works, but the Bible teaches that baptism is necessary **as a condition** of the gift of salvation, and **not as a means of earning it**. By their “*labor*,” the Israelites did *not* earn the land given to them by God (**Joshua 24:13**), but God required certain labor **as a condition** for it, such as marching around the city walls of Jericho (**Joshua 6**) and engaging in warfare (**Joshua 8:7**). Performing works *as a condition* upon receiving something is a very different thing than having received it due to *earning it* by works. God provided the means for Noah be saved from the destruction of the flood by telling him how to build the ark, but the actual building of it was a required condition on Noah’s part. Certainly the building of an ark was a “work” that did not earn Noah salvation from worldwide destruction, but was nevertheless something God required of him.

Turning over to **James 2**, we see a different context, in which baptism’s necessity actually does have relevance, unlike **Ephesians 2**. James speaks not on what salvation is based upon (the blood of Christ), but rather what salvation requires on the part of man—obedience. It should be no surprise, then, that here, James teaches that justification is “*by works*” and *not “faith alone”* (**v. 14, 20, 24**). It’s all about context! **“NOT OF YOURSELVES”**

As Paul states, salvation is “*not of yourselves*” (**v. 8**). It was God who prepared the plan to send His beloved Son to die so that men, by believing and obeying Him, could be saved (**Heb. 5:9**). Salvation didn’t come from men. This is exactly what Paul affirms to the Ephesians. It wasn’t they who created the way of salvation; they didn’t derive a way to clean their own sins or construct their own path to God out of their own ideas—it was through God’s grace. Nevertheless, despite the understanding of most of the denominational world, this

has nothing to do with whether or not baptism is necessary for salvation **as a condition**. Men did not dream up baptism; it didn't come from them (thus they cannot boast in it). God thought of it, and it was He who laid it down as a provision: "He that believeth **and** is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). The forgiveness of sin is what saves a man (when a man's sins are gone, he is no longer condemned), and this forgiveness is possible by Jesus' death (Matt. 26:28), not baptism, but God chose baptism, when performed out of faith and a repentant heart, to be when this absolution takes place. In this respect, baptism "saves us" (1 Pet. 3:21).

"SAVED THROUGH FAITH"

Furthermore, Paul writes that salvation is "through faith" (v. 8). Absolutely! Through faith a man obeys the gospel by repenting and being baptized. The Israelites believed God would bring down the walls of Jericho (as He said He would) if they adhered to His conditions—marching around the city, blowing their trumpets, and shouting (Joshua 6). Their faith led them to obey God's requirements and "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, **after** they were compassed about seven days" (Heb. 11:30). The construction of the ark was a necessary condition for escaping the watery demise of the flood, which Noah's faith "moved" him to do, so "**by faith**" Noah "prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Heb. 11:7). It's the same concept with baptism: we are saved "through faith" when that faith moves us to repent, confess Christ (Rom. 10:10; 1 John 4:15), and be baptized.

Multitudes of preachers blindly lead the blind with a false gospel saying baptism comes after salvation rather than before it. They are wrong. Men cannot earn their pardon, but they can look to Christ, obey the Gospel, and be saved. It is in baptism, that Christ forgives the sins of the man who has believed and has repented. So all in all, Christ is still doing the saving, not the water, and not the man. Baptism is certainly required, but this doesn't nullify the fact, the absolute fact, that without the unobligated, unearned, undeserved grace of Jesus Christ in sacrificing Himself as a payment for our transgressions, no redemption could be possible anyhow. Thanks to God for His love and grace through Jesus Christ!

I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH

by Randy Harshbarger

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). When Peter correctly identifies who Jesus is—the Messiah—the time is drawing near, the tension is mounting, and

the shadow of the cross looms on Calvary. Soon Jesus would return to heaven, leaving behind His apostles, a diverse of group who did not always (or, often) see the big picture. To know who Jesus was—the Anointed One, the Christ of God—was essential to their work as ambassadors for the Savior. Only a firm faith and recognition of who Jesus was would help keep these preachers on course; the early chapters of Acts demonstrate great resolve on their part in the face of great opposition. Christ, not Caesar, would build something the world had never seen before. How did Peter know who Jesus was? *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).* Peter could see who Jesus really was after having observed the Savior for the past nearly three years. It was not flesh and blood (a revelation from some human being), nor was it some kind of special revelation (a dream). Over the course of time Peter came to "see" who Jesus was. While the Pharisees continued to ask for signs, now, the close followers of Jesus are beginning to get the point. That is what we today need, too. We need to get the real point. We need to see and understand who Jesus really is—the Christ of God. What rock was the church built on? Peter or *petros* means stone. Rock or *petra* means a ledge, cliff, a large stone. This rock, *petra*, is used in **Matthew 7:24-27** where Jesus speaks of the wise man who builds his house on the rock, a solid foundation. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ is the foundation, the solid, large cliff, the large stone upon which the church is built. "Peter has just made a confession acknowledging Jesus' true identity ... Now Jesus declares what such an important truth would produce—a community of believers (Christ's church) against whom the power of sin and death would hold no victory." Peter's confession is the "bedrock on which this community of believers would be built" (Pope, *Matthew*, 504).

Rejecting the false teaching that Peter was the first pope as per Roman Catholicism, still consider a few facts about this apostle. Peter recognized who Jesus was. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He is featured prominently in **Acts 2** when the church was established. Peter tried to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die. Early in Acts Peter shows great courage before the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Peter was not perfect; he denied the Lord. And yet, here he is. With the other apostles, Peter would go into all the world, preaching repentance and remission of sins. In that message these men were bound by heaven's authority. Peter didn't build the church; Jesus did. Peter is not *that* rock; Jesus is. The keys didn't belong to Peter; they belonged to Christ. But Peter was a part of the church. And you can be, too.

DENOMINATIONAL SALVATION

by Kyle Pope

"Are you saved?" the lady asked me, as we stood and talked at my front door. "I hope that I am," I said, "but God will judge." A man and woman from a denomination came to my door years ago, as they were canvassing our neighborhood. "You can be sure of your salvation," she continued, "If you will accept Jesus as your personal Savior." These words were not unique. They could have been spoken by any preacher, or member of a denomination anywhere in the world. They have an element of truth to them, but they stem from some false concepts of salvation that overshadow any truth they might contain.

Man's Need for Salvation.

Jesus said that He came to *"seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Paul wrote that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). When we sin we separate ourselves from God and become *lost* in sin. To die in this condition means eternal punishment. Man stands in need of salvation from sin. God *"desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). Yet, how does this salvation come to us?

The Wrong Method of Salvation.

In Acts 16:30, when the keeper of the prison asked Paul and Silas *"What must I do to be saved,"* he was told, *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31). The text describes him acting upon this belief by washing the stripes of Paul and Silas (an indication of repentance) and being baptized (16:33). In Acts 8:35 when Philip taught *"Jesus"* to the Ethiopian nobleman, the man asked to be baptized (8:36). When he was he came up out of the water *"rejoicing"* (8:37). In spite of these clear teachings, most denominations teach that if someone desires to be saved, the method by which he or she acts upon this faith is prayer. "Repeat with me the 'Sinners Prayer'" they are told, "and you will be saved." The problem is there is no example of a lost sinner praying to God as the method of accepting salvation! In fact, the Bible teaches that God's ears are not open to the prayers of sinners (1 Peter 3:12).

The Wrong Access to Salvation.

When a person comes to recognize his or her need for salvation, the denominational concept teaches that if you "ask Jesus to come into your heart" you will be saved. Paul taught the Galatians *"as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (3:27). Paul taught the Romans that one is *"baptized into Christ Jesus"* which is to be *"baptized into His death"* (6:3). He goes on to explain that this union together in the *"likeness of His death"* (6:5) gives one the hope of resurrection unto life. To teach that someone is *in Christ* and thus has access to the salvation that is in Christ, before he or she has done what the Bible teaches is false doctrine!

The Wrong Conditions of Salvation.

Having convinced people of a false access to salvation, the denominational concept goes further to teach people that this salvation is not conditioned upon their faithfulness to God's word. John taught that *"if we walk in the light as He is in the light"* it is then that *"the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). If we should stumble, John goes on to teach that we must confess and turn from sin in order for God to *"cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1:9). Jesus taught *"he who endures to the end shall be saved"* (Matthew 24:13). The denominations teach that it is not necessary to be faithful in life, sound in doctrine or consistent in worship to be saved.

False Assurance of Salvation.

The Hebrew writer taught that the Christian can have *"boldness"* to come before God because of the *"blood of Jesus"* (10:19). We can be assured that when we abide in Christ our sins will be forgiven and we have the hope of salvation. The denominations, after telling people that there are no conditions upon which their salvation depends, then tell them that if they really have faith they can "be sure they are saved." Paul shows the fallacy of this notion. He wrote that, while he knew nothing *"against"* himself (i.e. anything he knew that might condemn him) he was not justified in this (1 Cor. 4:4a). Rather, *"He who judges me is the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 4:4b). In fact, although he was an apostle in the church, he worked every day to bring his body *"into subjection"* lest he *"should become disqualified"* (1 Corinthians 9:27). Confidence in one's salvation does not mean having false assurance or imagining that God requires nothing in obedience to Him.

A Different Gospel.

In Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia he rebuked them for turning *"...from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another..."* (Galatians 1:6b- 7a). He went on to say that some *"pervert the gospel"* (Galatians 1:7b). From what he writes in the epistle, the nature of this "false gospel" had to do with turning back to elements of the Old Law (5:4), binding circumcision (5:6) and Jewish Christians practicing segregation from Gentile believers (2:11,12). Paul doesn't call these things different "opinions." He didn't say, "you see it your way, I'll see it mine." He didn't say that doing and teaching different doctrines is practicing "Christian liberty." On the contrary, he said such falsehood robbed one of the liberty that is in Christ (5:1, 13). That being the case what must we conclude today about a "gospel" that teaches a way to salvation the Bible doesn't teach? What must we conclude about a "gospel" that teaches access to and assurance of a "salvation" the Bible never promised? We must conclude that it too is a *"different gospel"* which in fact *"is not another"* but is a false perversion of the gospel of Christ.

Taken from focusmagazine.org

Eph. 2:19 *So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, 20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone; 21 in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord;*

1Pet. 2:9 *But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10