

# Burial in the Plan of Salvation

by David A. Huston

*This paper was written as a response to those who say that forgiveness of sins takes place when a person repents.*

*Then Peter said to them, ‘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*

PAUL, THE APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST, stated without equivocation that we are not to preach any gospel other than the one he preached –and if we do, then let us be accursed (Galatians 1:8). For any who were unsure as to what gospel Paul preached, he articulated the main elements of his message in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. In this passage he states that the gospel consists of the death of Christ for our sins, the burial of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ on the third day.

The personal application of Paul’s gospel is presented in Acts 2:38 –the death of Christ being applied to us by means of repentance (whereas He died *for* sin, we must die *to* sin); His burial being applied to us through water baptism (we are in fact buried with Him in baptism );’and His resurrection being applied to us as we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (we rise from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life –the Spirit-filled life). That the gospel must be obeyed in order to be believed and received is fundamental to the most basic precepts of what we call the Apostolic Faith.

Having stated these obvious truths, why is it that some among us are being praised for preaching another gospel –one that says, Repent for the forgiveness of sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is like saying that Jesus died for our sins and rose again the third day. But what about the burial? Didn’t Jesus have to be buried before He could rise?

Leaving out the glorious truth about baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the

remission of sins is like preaching the resurrection and leaving out the burial. It is like saying the children of Israel could have received the Law at Mt. Sinai without first having passed through the Red Sea. It is like saying that the priests could have entered the tabernacle of Moses without first having washed at the brazen laver. But God said, When they go into the tabernacle of meeting...they shall wash with water, lest they die (Exodus 30:20). Baptism in the name of Jesus is neither an optional part of the gospel or an afterthought. Baptism, in fact, is the focal point.

## Repentance Re-defined

Part of the problem with this perverted gospel is that repentance has been redefined. Whereas repentance in the Bible is described as the *result* of godly sorrow, in this different gospel repentance *is* godly sorrow, accompanied by a request for God's forgiveness. But where in the Bible does it say that sinners coming to Christ need to ask for forgiveness? Furthermore, where does the Bible say that if a sinner simply asks God to forgive him he can be said to be forgiven? All this sounds a lot more like the sinner's prayer concept of salvation than the Book of Acts.

Instead of requiring sinners to ask for forgiveness, the Bible teaches that sinners need to enter into the forgiveness that has already been provided by the death of Christ on the Cross. By means of Calvary God has provided a blanket pardon for all of humanity. So the issue is not asking God to forgive, but rather taking hold of the forgiveness already available. How is this done? Is it by repenting alone? Not according to the Scripture. According to the Apostle Peter a sinner must Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Since the Greek word translated remission (*aphesis*) is accurately translated forgiveness six times in the King James Version, this verse could have been translated Repent and be baptized...for the *forgiveness* of sins. It is in fact translated this way in many translations (e.g. NIV, NEB). The only reason anyone would think that remission and forgiveness are different works of God is because of the King James translation, not from any study of the original language.

Furthermore, the word for is a translation of the Greek word *eis*, which is most often translated into. Regardless of how this word is translated, it is always looking ahead, never behind. Therefore, baptism looks ahead to the remission, or forgiveness, of sins, not back to something already received. We are not baptized because we are forgiven, but in order to be forgiven.

The Word of God would in no way be corrupted if we were to translate Acts 2:38 this way: Repent and be baptized...into the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is

not something we ask God for; it is a spiritual reality we enter into by repenting and submitting to baptism in the name of the Forgiver, Jesus Christ. And once we have arrived in this place of divine forgiveness, our conscience washed of every filthy stain, we are then promised the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## **Repentance Not Enough**

Nowhere in the Bible is repentance alone said to be sufficient for the forgiveness of the sinner coming to God (Proverbs 28:13 and 1 John 1:9 are written to believers). In fact, there is no way to know if a person has truly repented without presenting him with the opportunity to be baptized in the name of Jesus. The literal meaning of the Greek word translated *repentance* is to think again or reconsider. Implied in this definition is the decision to forsake sin and turn to God. It is possible, however, to forsake sin yet not turn to God in the right direction.

Some people genuinely repent in that they forsake sin, but they are never told of their need to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They mistakenly think that the good feeling they experience due to their decision to forsake sin and turn to God *is* salvation. But the truth is, they are yet not saved. Similarly, it is not enough to repent and turn to God for the baptism of the Holy Spirit —we are clearly instructed to turn to the water.

Yes, there is a biblical example of people receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit prior to their water baptism (Acts 10:44-48). But this was the sovereign working of God, done primarily to convince Peter and the other Jews that God had indeed accepted the Gentiles. Notice in this example that Peter gave the household of Cornelius no instructions as to *how* to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. They simply began to speak in tongues as the Spirit was poured out upon them.

Notice also that Peter immediately commanded them to be baptized in water. He didn't wait or delay at all. This was because Peter understood that salvation was predicated upon being born of both water and the Spirit (John 3:5). He also knew that the normal pattern was that Spirit baptism would follow water baptism (Acts 8:14-17; Acts 19:5-6). This was because the Spirit was intended to be God's seal placed upon the new believer's faith (Ephesians 1:13). It was intended to be given only to those who showed they would obey God (Acts 5:32). In the special case of Cornelius, God placed his seal upon the believers prior to their baptism. But this does not mean that God intended to establish another pattern. This was the exception, not the rule.

Indeed, many people have received the gift of the Holy Spirit prior to being baptized, the author of this article included. But in my case it was the sovereign

working of God in my heart. No one instructed me in how to receive the Spirit. I was earnestly praying during an altar call and the Spirit simply came upon me. I was then baptized in the name of the Savior that very night. Perhaps God gave me this marvelous gift because He could see that, like Cornelius, I would quickly comply with the command to be baptized.

But this scenario is entirely different from what is being done today. I have recently been to a number of meetings where the preacher preaches an uplifting, faith-inspiring message having little or nothing to do with Jesus, sin, hell, the Cross, the blood, the agony, the burial, or the resurrection. At the end of the message, a sudden shift takes place. The audience is asked, Now who here wants to receive the Holy Ghost? Those who raise their hands are asked to come forward and stand in a line across the front of the sanctuary.

The entire audience is then told that everyone there needs to repent and ask God for forgiveness. After a few minutes of heartfelt prayer, sometimes accompanied by crying and shaking, everyone is told that God has forgiven them. They are then instructed to begin praising God and simply receive the Holy Spirit. Inevitably within a few more minutes people are speaking in tongues.

I have been in some meetings where the people who spoke in tongues were never told anything at all about baptism. In one camp meeting they were told at the end of the service to be sure to talk to their pastor the following Sunday about being baptized. Either way, all of these people were allowed to leave the meeting believing they were forgiven and filled with the Spirit. What else is needed for salvation? But Jesus never said, He who believes and speaks in tongues shall be saved. He said, He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. Speaking in tongues was to be a sign that would follow those who believe (Mark 16:16-17). Even if these people were eventually baptized in the name of Jesus, the majority of them would have had no conscious perception that they were being baptized in order to be saved. Plainly their walk with God was being established on a faulty foundation.

## **The Easy Path**

Why are some preachers preaching this distorted gospel? Perhaps some are only copying what they have seen and heard, thinking that the appearance of success justifies the means. But there is another, more subtle, reason why some are attracted to this message. The undeniable fact is: this gospel virtually eliminates the risk of rejection? Think about it!

If I offer people the opportunity to receive a wonderful gift from God, no strings attached, most will readily accept such an offer. Likewise, if I tell people that God

will forgive them if they simply ask Him to, why would anyone not simply ask? But if I tell a person that God has promised this wonderful gift to those who obey Him by turning away from a life of sin and submitting themselves to God's authority by being water baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, now a whole bag of worms has been opened. Well I've already been baptized. "I was baptized as a baby. "I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. "I don't see why I have to be baptized in Jesus' name. "Are you saying I have to be baptized to be saved? Obviously when baptism in Jesus' name is brought in, the risk of rejection is increased dramatically.

Jesus said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47). He also said, "And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). Anyone who has preached the true and complete gospel of Christ for any length of time knows that this hatred and rejection almost always revolves around the question of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. This is the focal point of the gospel. This is the dividing line. This is the stumbling block. To leave out baptism is to leave out the name, the blood, and the pardoning power of God. It is to leave out submission, brokenness, humility, and commitment. It is to leave out the Lordship of Christ.

I have recently seen reports that read something like this: 5 repented, 3 were baptized, 16 received the Holy Ghost. How can anyone know who has repented and who hasn't? By counting the number that prayed? The number that cried? This is not repentance, if we go by the Bible's definition. And how could it be that a person repented but didn't get baptized. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized...." These are inseparable concepts. You cannot say you have really repented unless you have also presented yourself to be baptized in the name of Jesus. The number we ought to be reporting is how many repented and were baptized.

Furthermore, why is it almost always the case that far more people received the Holy Ghost than were baptized? Is it because the crowd was full of Samaritans who had previously been baptized and were awaiting the gift of the Spirit? Not likely. No, most of the time it is because those who were quick to come and receive the gift of God were not so quick to submit themselves to the Giver by being baptized in His name. The Book of Acts doesn't say that as many as gladly received Peter's message were filled with the Spirit; it says they were baptized. The number reported on the Day of Pentecost was how many were baptized into the body of Christ, not how many spoke in tongues (I hope it was all 3000, but the Bible doesn't tell us.).

## No Other Gospel

Whenever we present the gospel as an opportunity to ask God for forgiveness and receive the Holy Spirit, we make ourselves no different than the charismatics. In fact, at several of our meetings I have had to pinch myself because it seemed as though I was at a charismatic meeting. What, I ask, is the difference? And why should it be any surprise that a large segment of our movement is looking more and more like the Charismatics with every passing day. We better wake up!

Where are the men of God who will preach Acts 2:38 the way it is written? It is an irresponsible mishandling of the elements of the gospel to offer people the renewing of the Holy Spirit without first proclaiming the washing of regeneration. We need to preach the gospel decently and in order. It is the water and the Spirit, not the Spirit and the water...some other time...if you get around to it.

Where are the bondservants of Christ who will preach the same gospel Peter and Paul preached, even if it means risking the same rejection and hatred they faced? Where are the mighty men of valor who will condemn this watered down, compromised gospel for what it really is: a perversion of biblical doctrine which may please men, but certainly does not please God. As Paul said concerning anyone who preaches any gospel other than the one he preached, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:9).

**This article appeared in the January-March issue of *Forward*, a magazine for the licensed ministers of the United Pentecostal Church International.**