



"And this is the commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also." 1 John 4: 21

Sunday – February 24, 2008

Heart to Heart... (Baptism part 3)

The religious world is not uniting people to oneness in the truth. Jesus prayed and called for oneness and only the truth can bring that about (John 17:14-26). Let's study with humble and honest hearts. There are so many varied and different teachings that things are confusing at best. The question arises; *does one have to be baptized to be saved?* Some believe baptism should be carried out but if it is not, there is no great loss. Some dismiss it altogether as not worthy of discussion. Some insist baptism is part of God's bringing the sinner into a saving union with Christ and others believe it is just an ordinance you attend to after you have been saved. Still others think baptism is a work on man's part. When one is honest, looking at the whole, it is amazing how so many come up with the different degrees of belief in regard to baptism and salvation while using the same Bible.

At first, when one is confronted with the idea of baptism in relation to salvation, many immediately head to the thief on the cross as a proving point stating he was saved without baptism. What escapes notice is Jesus had not yet died for the sins of the world. The new covenant was not in effect until Jesus died and was raised (Hebrews 9:15-22). Until the death of Jesus, the Jewish nation was still under the old covenant. In His teachings, Jesus was preparing the true, penitent believers for the new covenant that He was ushering in through His blood. In Mark 2:10, Jesus states in the healing of a paralytic, ***"But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."*** Jesus had the authority to forgive while on earth, prior to His death. After His death, there was a major change in the covenant and teachings. Upon His resurrection from the dead, prior to ascending back to the Father, He gathered His apostles to Himself and said to them, ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."*** Did Jesus mislead His apostles? Did Jesus not mean what He said? Jesus charged His apostles the gospel must be preached (which many do not even know what the gospel is scripturally) and the faith response upon preaching that gospel was baptism. Here is where things get difficult for many who reject the notion of baptism tied to salvation. Many quickly dismiss this teaching of Jesus trying to find away around what He says because it does not suit their own belief system. Jesus ascends to the Father and left His apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 1). The preaching of the gospel as commanded by Jesus was going to begin in Jerusalem. Jesus had promised the coming of the Spirit upon these men (the apostles specifically) and they were to wait until they had received power from the Holy Spirit and they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). God used this miraculous event of the Holy Spirit descending to gather together the people in Jerusalem that day to hear the gospel message from the apostles (Acts 2:1-13)! They needed the miraculous event because a change in covenants was in order. How else were the apostles going to convince the people about this change without help from the Lord? God gave convincing proofs by raising Jesus from the dead, speaking in tongues (languages) and various miracles (Hebrews 2:2-4)! Peter began speaking for the apostles, teaching and proving from Scripture that everything that was happening was spoken through the Old Testament prophets. Joel and David are quoted saying God had predicted all this (Acts 2:14-36). The death of Jesus was all under the oversight of God, and God raised this Jesus, declaring Him both Lord and Christ (Messiah), the One they had crucified! They were all guilty and held accountable for killing the Messiah they had so long waited for. What were they going to do? How could they find a way out of this condemnation? They asked the apostles that very question (Acts 2:37). Here is what the apostle Peter told them: ***"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*** (Acts 2:38) This was the first declaration preached and the faith response expected after the resurrected Christ. *This was not some man made teaching or religious belief!* The inspired apostle Peter preached what the Lord wanted preached. Why do so many refuse this teaching today? That is the same question that can be asked of those on that day that heard. Why did many of them refuse? Because they did not believe this was the answer! They had their own ideas of approaching God. The drawing line between forgiven and not forgiven was accepting the message Peter and the apostles preached. Maybe we need to ask, did Peter lie to them and us? More next week. Think about it!!!