

Why Won't You Listen?

Written by Kris Brewer

Sunday, 19 August 2012 01:02 - Last Updated Sunday, 19 August 2012 01:08

One of the challenges of teaching the gospel message is convincing people that they need to actually respond to the message that was delivered by God. There are many who are convinced that they have been obedient, but in reality they have failed to listen to the message that God has sent. They are very much willing to be obedient to the instructions of men, but not of God! Jesus knew that this would be an issue among people, for as long as the world would stand. Consider His warning from the first century:

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.” (Luke 6:46–49)

The world is full of people who want to call Jesus “Lord,” but who are unwilling to actually listen to what He has commanded. Men have determined that they can reject the message of Christ, and still expect Him to provide salvation. But Jesus has connected our obedience to His willingness to forgive sins. That is, forgiveness of sins is conditional, and contingent upon our willingness to act in response to His message.

Now, you may be reading this and thinking, “I’m willing to do whatever Christ has commanded!” That is a great attitude. However, the question is, are you willing to actually do, or is that merely lip service? Again, consider the words of Jesus, who knew that there would be many who served Him with lips only:

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“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:21–23)

It is easy to declare that we are serving the Lord, but the proof of our relationship with Him is in our obedience to Him. One can claim to do all manner of “good works” for the cause of Christ, and yet, if he is not truly being obedient to Christ, his good works go for naught spiritually. There will be many, on the judgment day, who say to the great Judge, “Lord, Lord, have we not built homeless shelters and halfway houses in your name, built orphanages and unwed mothers’ homes in your name, and done many great things in your name?” And the response is going to be the same as what Jesus said in the first century! “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” You see, if we are not willing to do what Jesus has commanded us to do, all the other things that we declare to be “good works” are useless!

Instead of looking for excuses to disregard the commands of Jesus, we should be willing to put into practice anything, and everything that He commands us to do. This is quite problematic for most of the religious world. It has become quite popular to explain away Jesus' teachings as being non-applicable to us today. Many, drawing improper conclusions from various scriptures, declare that we are not responsible for any acts of obedience, as that would make it so that we “earn” our salvation. But, is that what scriptures teach? Is it what Jesus Himself said? We should return to the scriptures, rather than the teachings and traditions of men (Colossians 2:8).

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Does God require action before He is willing to extend salvation? The biblical answer is a resounding, "Yes!" The Lord has made the salvation He has offered contingent upon obedience. For example, He requires belief (John 3:16). While many argue that belief is not a "work", consider that it takes some action on a person's part to come to belief. It does not just happen! But God also requires that one repent of their sins (2 Corinthians 7:10). This is an act that every person must submit to, or else they cannot receive the salvation of God. God also requires that a person confess the name of His Son in order to receive salvation (Romans 10:9-10). A person who refuses to confess the name of Christ (a work on his part) will not be granted the forgiveness of his sins!

Most people will never argue with these passages, even though they blatantly contradict their deeply held belief that we are not required to do any work to attain salvation. They will not argue that a person who refuses to confess Christ can still be saved. Many will not argue that a person who refuses to repent can be saved. However, when it comes to the act of baptism, many people suddenly want to argue with the word of God! We are told that salvation comes before baptism. We are told that one can be saved without baptism. We are told that baptism is nothing more than a token sign that one has already been saved. But, is that really how scripture, the word of God, speaks of the work of baptism? Certainly not!

Baptism saves us. Just like other things are necessary for salvation, so is baptism. We are saved by faith. We are saved by grace. We are saved by confession. We are saved by repentance. And we are saved by baptism. Consider the words of the inspired writer, Peter, after he had introduced the example of Noah and his family being saved by the waters of the flood:

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There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 3:21)

Though many have tried to explain away Peter's words, they simply cannot be changed. One is saved through the act of baptism. One cannot be saved without the act of baptism. It seems that many think they can dismiss this verse, be justified rejecting the need for baptism. But, a close examination of other scriptures reveals the same principle!

Baptism washes away sins. It has been quite puzzling to determine how people who have not had their sins removed can be saved. After all, it is sin that separates us from God, and therefore puts us into a "lost" state. Saul of Tarsus, before he was the apostle Paul, was approached by Christ Himself. The predominant misconception is that Saul was saved "on the road to Damascus" when Jesus appeared to him. But that interpretation does not deal faithfully with the text. Saul was sent on his way, into the city of Damascus, where he was told that another would come to him and tell him "what (he) must do" (Acts 9:6). Once there, Saul prayed for three days, and yet he still did not have his sins removed. Ananias came to him, and revealed that he still had to do something else to have his sins removed:

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' (Acts 22:16)

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Saul was told that he needed to stop waiting, and be baptized so that his sins would be washed away. There is no other method recorded in scripture for the alien sinner to have his sins removed. He must submit to the command of God so that his sins can be washed away. Only when sin is “washed away” can relationship with God be restored (as that sin is no longer there to separate one from God), and therefore only at the point of having sins washed away can a person receive the Lord’s salvation! Saul was not saved until he was baptized, and people today cannot be saved without baptism either.

In Acts 2, when Peter and the other apostles preached the very first gospel sermon, it convicted many of the crowd who heard them. They were in anguish, knowing that they had sinned against God and that their sin separated them from Him. They cried out, pleading with Peter to tell them what they needed to do to rectify the situation. Peter responded with a message that was clear then, and remains clear today:

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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38–39)

They had to be baptized “for the remission of sins,” that is so that their sins would be forgiven. Just as their sins would not be remitted without repentance, they would not be remitted without baptism. Just as with the example of Saul of Tarsus, their sins lingered until they submitted to baptism and had them washed away. They remained separated from God until they submitted to His command to be baptized!

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Baptism puts one into Christ. There is a need to have relationship with Christ if we want to enjoy His salvation. Paul writes that we have “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Without being “in Christ” we cannot have access to the spiritual blessings that He offers. Only one passage tells us specifically how to get “into Christ”:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:26–27)

This passage connects the dots, explaining that belief is culminated in baptism, and only at that point is one “in Christ.” You cannot put on Christ in any other way than through baptism. Belief alone does not do it. Belief with repentance and confession does not do it. It requires the fullness of the plan of God, including submission to Him in baptism. One can believe, but that will never, by itself, put him into Christ! Is it possible to be outside of Christ, and still be saved? Certainly not!

Baptism puts the old man of sin to death. The Lord demands a change from those who would be His people. They are not permitted to continue on in the same worldly manner as they had been in before conversion. The New Testament speaks of this transition as putting the old man of sin to death, and raising up a new man, to walk in newness of life. In Romans chapter 6, the apostle Paul shows the process by which this transition is to take place, and at its very center is the act of baptism.

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Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:3–11)

Notice that Paul shows us that it is through the act of baptism that we are brought into the death of Christ. While many want to speak of the blood of Christ washing away sins, they fail to recognize that it is through the act of baptism that mankind has the ability to be joined with His sacrifice, and His death. Without submission to baptism, one cannot take part in the sacrifice of His death! Paul also shows us that one cannot be in the likeness of the resurrection of Christ, if he has never involved himself in the likeness of the death of Christ. How can one truly live the life that God expects if he has never submitted to God's commands? It is, according to the inspired writer, through the act of baptism that the old man of sin is crucified with Christ. Can one be saved, having his sins forgiven, if he has never crucified the old man of sin? It is also through this act of baptism that a person frees himself from the bondage, the slavery of sin. Can one be saved if he still remains enslaved to sin? It is through our obedience to God in the act of baptism that we can reckon ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God. If we reject His instruction pertaining to baptism, how can we think ourselves "alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

As we conclude our thoughts on this vital subject, it is important for us to return to the original context of our study. Remember, Jesus asked the question: "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" That piercing question is just as relevant today as when Jesus asked it some 2000 years ago. We have looked at several passages of scripture that show that God's plan of salvation includes submission to Him, obedience to His command

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of baptism. You, dear reader, must ask yourself the question: "Am I calling Him 'Lord, Lord,' but refusing to do the things He has commanded?" If a person is unwilling to do the will of Christ, He is not their Lord, no matter what they may call Him. He can only be your Lord if you are willing to be obedient to His message of salvation, leaving behind the corrupted traditions of men.