

The Conditions of the Gospel Reasonable

by G.W. Longan

The Gospel of Christ is both the power and wisdom of God, and its conditions are reasonable and necessary for salvation.

Scripture: Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:23, Colossians 2:12

Topics: "The Cross", "Salvation Plan"

Description

G.W. Longan preaches about the central importance of Jesus Christ and the Cross in the Divine history, emphasizing that every truth in the Bible is subordinate to the grand central idea of the Cross. He explains that the Gospel of Christ, encompassing 'Christ,' 'the Cross of Christ,' and 'Christ crucified,' is the power and wisdom of God, demonstrating God's infinite wisdom in the redemption of sinners. Longan delves into the necessity of repentance and faith in the Gospel, highlighting that God's salvation plan is built upon unchanging principles and the eternal laws of God's moral government.

Transcript

"For the Jews ask for a sign from heaven, and the Greeks demand a system of philosophy; but we proclaim a Messiah crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks a folly; but to the called themselves, whether they be Jews or Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."--1 COR. 1: 23, 24, (CONYBEARE'S TRANS.)

ESUS, the Son of God, is the great central personage of the Divine history. All human characters, however great and good, are subordinate to him, and their names appear in the Sacred Volume only because of the relationship they bear to him in his fleshly lineage, or in order to the better unfolding of his mission of mercy to the world. So the Cross of Christ is the grand central idea in the System of Redemption. Every other conception in the wide range of revealed truth is subordinate to this, and is more or less important, as it is more or less closely related to this grand center of the remedial economy. "Christ," the "Cross of Christ," and "Christ crucified," are to be taken as comprehensive generalizations, including every precious truth which enters into that wondrous system revealed upon the blessed pages of the Book of books. To preach "Christ," or "the Cross of Christ," [187] or "Christ crucified," is, therefore, to preach the Gospel in its broadest amplitude. "Philip began at the same scripture, and preached to him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came to a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Here we learn that "to preach Jesus" is to preach the whole Gospel. When Philip preached Jesus, the eunuch learned that it was his duty not only to believe, but even

to be baptized. The expressions "Christ" and "Christ crucified," in the text, are clearly to be understood in the same way. They stand for the entire Gospel. Of this, I presume to say, there can be no doubt whatever. Substituting, therefore, for "Christ crucified" its proper equivalent, Gospel of Christ, and omitting, without violence to the meaning of the apostle, what is unnecessary to my present purpose, we have the following somewhat startling proposition distinctly enunciated, viz.: The Gospel of Christ is both the power and wisdom of God. To the latter affirmation in this apostolic deliverance I propose to call your attention in this discourse. I shall accept the apostle's words in the fullness of their meaning. I am troubled with no skeptical misgivings on this question. I believe, with my whole heart, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the wisdom of the infinite Jehovah. I shall proceed to give some of the reasons for this faith.

The created universe, in all its visible, tangible, substantive forms, is merely phenomenal. Change is written all over it in legible characters by the finger of the Almighty himself. The mighty forces which are ceaselessly working throughout the domain of matter only obey his behests, and accomplish the counsels of his will. That will is law to the farthest bound of the creation, and in that which is purely material has never been disobeyed. Laws which are [188] but the outgoings of the will of Jehovah, underlie all the sublime and wondrous manifestations beneath us, above us, and around us. It is impossible for a thinking man to escape the conclusion that God works throughout nature by laws as eternal as are the foundations of his own throne. The laws of mind are no less fixed and unchangeable than the laws of matter. The principles which form the basis of God's moral government are as immutable as those by which he determines the manifold phenomena of the physical creation. Whatever is reducible to necessary principles is, therefore, in harmony with the highest wisdom. If, then, the Gospel of Christ, in all its provisions and in all its requirements, is based upon unchanging principles, and springs up necessarily from the very relations which subsist between God and men, for whom it is intended, then is God's wisdom in giving the Gospel vindicated, and our obligation to obey it certainly established. The enlightened Christian does not fear an appeal to reason. He does not deify reason, and fall down and pay it idolatrous homage; he does not depend upon it for the knowledge of God, nor dare to rationalize into myth and fable the teachings of the Divine Word; but grounding the highest and holiest beliefs of his heart upon that Word, and accepting every sentence and every syllable as divine, he does not fear either the logic or the laugh of any daring infidel who may assault the faith that sustains his soul. He believes that as right reason is from God, and is one of his best gifts, so God's Gospel, though confessedly above reason, is, nevertheless, in perfect harmony with its most exalted demonstrations.

If these premises are true, then everything in the Gospel has its reason. Nothing has been done without an end, and nothing is required without a necessity. When God [189] sent his Son into the world, there was a reason for it; there was an end to be gained that could not be gained in any other way. When Jesus died, there was a necessity for it. It was not merely an arbitrary arrangement, that might as well have been dispensed with as not. God does nothing without a reason; so in the conditions of the Gospel there is a reason for every thing that God requires. There is no condition imposed without a corresponding necessity. God does nothing without a reason himself, and demands nothing without a reason from men. If the Gospel of Jesus Christ is reasonable, then it is adapted to man as he is; to man in his present attitude to God's throne, and law, and government; to man in his relations to time and to eternity. Such an adaptation demonstrated, and the Gospel is shown to be Divine, and its wisdom vindicated as the wisdom of God.

The Gospel scheme is built upon the assumption that men, in their present relations to God, are sinners. There is no attempt in the Bible to develop this conclusion by logical processes or philosophical

speculation. The first preachers of the Gospel proceeded in this matter very much as Moses did in opening up to the world the grand drama of the creation. He does not philosophize to establish the existence of Jehovah, but breaks upon us suddenly with the startling announcement, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." So the apostles approach men just as though it were a potent and undeniable fact that all are sinners. They appeal to universal consciousness, and all hearts respond to the appeal, as the eye to light, or the ear to sound.

The Gospel is intended for sinners. It is adapted only to sinners. If, therefore, men are not sinners, they do not need the Gospel. If men are not lost, or in danger [190] of being lost, they do not need a Savior. If men are not guilty, they do not need forgiveness. Come, then, scoffing infidel, laughing at the wisdom of God with heaven-defying presumption, as though it were worse than human folly, come, meet us now at this first step in our investigations, and overturn the very foundation upon which the Gospel rests. Deny, if you will, that you are a sinner. Let there be no faltering here. Meet the issue like an honest man. The day is coming when the secrets of that heart can no longer be buried in the mysterious depths of your own consciousness. Be candid, speak out, and let heaven witness the integrity of your avowal.

There never was a heart thus questioned that answered honestly, but the answer was the same. "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God; they are all gone out of the way; they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one." Such is the universal proposition that underlies the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If this be not true, the Gospel is a delusion, and Jesus an impostor and cheat. But this true, and we have this the first link in that grand chain of adaptations that demonstrates the Gospel to be divine, and vindicates the wisdom of God in the redemption offered to the world. God is the rightful Lawgiver in the universe which he has made. All men on earth, as well as all angels in heaven, are under law to him. The eternal distinction between right and wrong has been disregarded. Our entire race has trampled upon the Divine will and defied the Divine authority. If these things are not so, then the axiomata of science, the intuitions of the understanding, are a delusion, a dream, and all human knowledge a myth, a fantasm, an airy gambol of the unbridled imagination. The first great want of [191] our race is, therefore, the favor of an offended God, the forgiveness of sins, the salvation of the soul. Deep in the recesses of every heart, that has by law obtained the knowledge of sin, reposes this conviction. You could as easily overturn the very foundations of all thought and all faith as eradicate this conviction, thus obtained, from the soul where reason holds its sway.

Assuming, then, as a great first truth this undeniable fact regarding our relations to the God that made us, the Gospel comes to us tendering a heaven-originated remedy for the danger to which we stand momentarily exposed. It offers pardon of sin, peace with God, and a home in heaven. If this Gospel is divine, then there is balm in Gilead; there is a physician come to us whose skill we may trust with a confidence that knows no fear, and is strongest still when the storm-cloud of danger lowers darkest above us. But if this Gospel is not divine, then is the world a desert waste, and life a burden to be borne with ceaseless sighs and tears.

In the Gospel tender of salvation, every thing is based upon what Christ has done for us. His blood is "the fountain for sin and uncleanness." He, himself, is the "Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." He is the antitype of every bleeding victim slain as a sin-offering from the very morning of time. It is only through him that God proposes to be merciful to men, and it is only in him that we find peace with God, and the forgiveness of sins. It is no part of my present purpose to enter into the rationale of this part of heaven's grand remedy for human guilt. That a philosophy, as profound as the depths of the Infinite Mind, lies at the foundation of the death of Jesus, I believe as devoutly as I believe in God, or in the Conscious

emotions of my own soul. But the [192] theme were too broad for my present limits, too grand for one who feels himself but a child in the deep things of God. Waiving, then, for the present, all inquiries into this sublimest of all subjects, I pass to consider the conditions upon which the tender of salvation has been made. I devoutly believe that these conditions are precisely what they ought to be. I am sure there is an adequate reason for each step that the sinner is required to take. I am certain nothing is demanded which is not worthy of the Jehovah that makes the demand. To show this to be true is my present task.

It will be perceived that I assume it as certain, that the salvation tendered in the Gospel is not an unconditional salvation. The Gospel itself is not an universal declaration of amnesty to sinners without a proviso or a limitation. The amnesty offered can only be enjoyed by complying with the terms prescribed. Without the death of Christ, the grace of pardon would not, could not, have been offered. But with the death of Christ, the wisdom of God still declares that other questions are involved, which must not be overlooked in granting the boon of forgiveness to the world. These other questions concern the status of the sinner himself. Is his present position to the law and government of the Almighty such as to justify his forgiveness? No earthly ruler would feel himself authorized to extend clemency to an offender against the law, without considering the status of the offender himself. Does he realize the magnitude of his crime? Is there reason to believe that, if he shall be pardoned now, he will not again repeat the offense? How is he at present affected to the law? And what reasons are there to conclude, if past infractions are overlooked, that he will obey it faithfully in time to come. And what influence [193] may the exercise of clemency in this case have upon others who may be tempted to similar offenses? Will others, seeing the impunity in this case, and looking for a like impunity themselves, be thereby encouraged to disregard the authority of the state, and trample under foot its most solemnly enacted laws? Wisdom demands that questions like these shall be duly considered, and the earthly ruler, who should act in disregard of the principles here implied, would justly incur the contempt of all right-thinking men.

In dispensing the clemency of the Divine government, nothing is overlooked that Infinite Wisdom perceives to be important. Every consideration, bearing however remotely upon the contemplated action of the Sovereign of the Universe, is given all the weight to which it is entitled. Every contingency is fully provided for, and all apparent antagonisms fully harmonized. In making salvation possible, God has done just enough--nothing more. God has never performed, since the universe began, a single unnecessary act. This his Infinite Wisdom clearly necessitates. As, therefore, God, in providing salvation, has done just enough--no more, no less--so, in granting salvation, he will demand from the sinner, in the way of condition, just so much as, and no more than, the eternal fitness of things requires. God proposes to meet and forgive the sinner at the right point. The only reason he interposes a condition at all, is that Infinite Wisdom declares conditions necessary. The conditions must, therefore, be just so many as this wisdom demands. If the sinner can, by making a single step, put himself into a position where it will be proper for God to meet him and forgive him, then he will be required to make only that step. If more than one step is required, it is because Divine Wisdom perceives that more than one step is necessary. I [194] therefore reiterate the position, God in the Gospel proposes to meet the sinner in precisely the right place. There is no reason why there is a single unsaved sinner on earth to-day, other than this one, viz.: that all sinners do not stand in such an attitude to God's law and government as to make their salvation possible according to the perfect wisdom in which that government is administered. What else can be in the way of salvation? What else can obstruct the free course of the love of God. If it were simply a question of philanthropy, God would save every body. If it were a question of physical power, he would save every body. just at this point the Calvinist and the Universalist are alike crazy. The one will have it, because God is sovereign, and some are lost, that, therefore, from all eternity, God willed and determined them to endless perdition; while

the other, with a well-affected pathos, persistently declares that God is good, and all, in the end, must be saved. There is more involved in this matter than either of them has ever dreamed. Infinite Wisdom made man a free agent, and Infinite Wisdom will not ignore that agency in saving him. God wills the salvation of men, but not upon principles that might loosen the foundations of the eternal throne. God wills to save the sinner, but the sinner must put himself in a position where God can bestow the boon in harmony with unchanging and eternal laws. One such law violated, and the universe would never recover from the shock. The reign of chaos would come again.

As regards the salvation of men, God has removed out of the way every obstacle that he could remove. Of that which was necessary to be done, every thing which depended on his agency alone, has been done. Every difficulty on the side of the Almighty has been taken out of [195] the way. Antagonisms seemingly to man irreconcilable, have been fully harmonized in the Great Sacrifice, and now all that remains is for the sinner himself to move in the matter. Will he put himself in a position where the love of God and the blood of Christ can reach him? This is now the great question on which hangs the eternal weal or woe of the entire race.

What, then, must the sinner do? How many are the steps he is required to make? What are those steps? I answer: He must believe in Jesus Christ; this is the first step. He must heartily repent of all his sins; this is the second step. He must be solemnly baptized upon a confession of his faith in the Son of God; this is the third and last step required in the Divine arrangement. Now, I affirm that the hand-writing of the Almighty is as clearly legible here, as in any one of the tens of thousands of adaptations in the physical universe. I do not now argue the New Testament authority for the successive steps here laid down. For the present, this is assumed. I only assert that the offer of pardon, on these conditions, may be vindicated by an appeal to reason. I declare it as my conviction, that traces of the wisdom of Jehovah may be as clearly discovered here as anywhere in the universe. Let us see.

The sinner can do nothing to change the past. This is clearly impossible. The conditions of the Gospel are not then intended for this purpose. The past, with its hopes and its fears, its joys and its sorrows, is now history. The poor sinner can not undo a single deed, or cancel a single sin. No faith, however genuine, no repentance, however deep and sincere, no act of obedience, however plainly commanded, and however necessary to be performed, can affect a single transaction in the record already made. The things to be done now, can only affect one's present attitude to the [196] law and throne of God. More than this is simply impossible. Omnipotence even (with reverence I speak it) can not change the past. God can forgive sin, but can not change the fact. At whatever point, therefore, God may meet and forgive the sinner, it is clearly an act of grace. It does not matter how many steps the sinner may be required to make, the principle is just the same. It is just as much grace if three steps should be required as if there were but one. This is too clear to require further argument. All that the sinner can do, is to put himself in the proper attitude. The conditions of the Gospel accomplish this much, and nothing more. This is all that is possible to him, and, blessed be God, no more is required. Forgiveness is a merciful boon, an unbought gratuity; and yet all men are not in a proper condition to receive it. The very laws which influence the being of Jehovah himself, forbid the extension of this boon to any who will not stand where it may be consistently bestowed. The point where God proposes to meet the sinner, is, therefore, the point indicated by his wisdom as the proper one. In the face of all the religious and irreligious skepticism of the day, I declare it as my firm conviction, that right reason harmonizes with the Word of the Lord in locating the forgiveness of sins immediately after the third step in the pathway of obedience. I am not ashamed of the Gospel. I maintain that its conditions are wise and just, and shall stand by and defend them as such till the Lord

comes.

I lay it down as self-evident, that while the sinner continues to love and practice sin, his forgiveness is simply an impossibility. Every attribute of the Divine nature forbids it. He must lay down the weapons of his warfare against God. He must cease to rebel against the Divine government. He must give up his unholy opposition to [197] the Jehovah, whose right it is to rule. This necessity is as stern and unbending as the laws which influence the being of the Almighty Ruler himself.

It springs up necessarily out of the very relations that men sustain to God as Lawgiver of the Universe. Deny this necessity, and you destroy the Divine government and overthrow its very foundations. It is impossible, in the very nature of things, for God to forgive an impenitent sinner. Every stone in the universe would cry out against it. It would excite the astonishment of the demons in the infernal regions, and fill all heaven with amazement and alarm. It does not matter about the Divine philanthropy.

It amounts to nothing that God is love. It is of no avail that Christ has died. Impenitence is an impassable barrier between the sinner and his God. Infinite love can not surmount such an obstacle as this. Infinite power, directed by Infinite Wisdom, can not remove it when the Gospel fails. Away with all idle cant about the sovereignty of grace! Let us have no dreamy and delusive sentimentalism concerning Infinite Love. The universe contains no remedy for a sinner that will not repent.

It is time that this were fully understood. It will be too late when the thunders of the last day shall burst upon the world. Thousands of souls, drugged and crazed with Calvinian nostrums, have gone into eternity waiting for the Lord's good time. Thousands now are living under the delusion that Almighty Love will restore all things in the end. I forewarn you to-day that God proposes no remedy for impenitence. He appeals to you in the Gospel, and if you will not hear that appeal, there is no hope for you.

He made you free, and will not violate that freedom, even to save you. Can you not see, sinner, that you must move in this matter, or go down to perdition? God can not come to you where you [198] are. He spreads wide the arms of his love, and entreats you to come to him. Sinner, will you come? The barrier is on your side, and you alone can remove it. God has made you free, and you must use that freedom, or perish forever. So decides the Book of God, and right reason vindicates the decision.

The command to repent is not an arbitrary command; it is not a tyrannical edict; it is not an exhibition of authority simply as such, but authority rightful and unquestioned, grounding its exercise, however, upon necessity and the eternal fitness of things. This necessity, this fitness of things, is the reason which underlies the command. The existence of this necessity is the vindication of the Great Lawgiver in making the requirement, and suspending upon our compliance with it the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life.

It were as easy to deny any other self-evident truth in the universe as the existence of the necessity here contended for. God makes his appeals direct to the honest intentions of the soul, and the response is instant and universal. The position is, therefore, immovably established. It is as certain as any other proposition in the wide range of human thought, that God requires the sinner to repent, simply because that, in the nature of things, and from the very relations subsisting between the parties, the sinner's forgiveness is impossible without it. So let it be understood and acknowledged till the Lord comes.

But why is the sinner commanded to believe? Infidels sometimes put on a wise face, and stand up and reason against God. Faith, say these wiseacres, is involuntary. A man can not help his beliefs, and

therefore it is wrong that he should be held responsible for them. This is a false and dangerous philosophy. A man can help his belief. A man can help believing a falsehood when the truth [199] is within his reach, provided he will honestly search for the truth. I do not believe there is an honest infidel on earth to-day that has patiently and prayerfully sought to know the truth.

A man's beliefs are not wholly involuntary. Away with such reasoning against God; there is not a word of truth in it. Again: it has been said that there is no moral value in faith, and that to justify or condemn on the ground of believing or disbelieving, is, therefore, clearly preposterous. I grant, freely grant, that faith is not in itself righteousness; that it is no moral equivalent for obedience to a righteous law. But this is not the reason that God requires men to believe.

Such is not the philosophy that underlies this part of the law of forgiveness. The reason is here: the sinner can not be pardoned in impenitence, and he can not repent without faith. Faith is necessary as a means to an end. Repentance, in this case, is the end, and you can not reach it otherwise than through faith. "First fact, then faith, then feeling." The truth must be heard, understood, believed, pass through the understanding into the heart, and thus become the power of God to stir the depths of the moral nature.

To me, at least, it is self-evident that God works every-where by established laws, and upon every thing according to its nature. Matter and mind are subject to different laws, and God does not ignore this fact in operating upon them. He influences mind, according to the laws of mind. He works upon matter in harmony with its nature. The wisdom of God in the Gospel is seen in this, that every thing is adapted to man just as he is; to his condition, his relations, his organization, to every thing that touches at any point the grand scheme of mercy to the world.

If it were God's plan to change the heart, to renovate the affections by a direct touch of the Holy Spirit, then it could be done as [200] well without faith as with it, as well without the Gospel and where the Gospel has never been, as where it is preached and understood. But the plan of the Heavenly Father is to take man as he is, to influence him and save him, if he saves him at all, in perfect harmony with all the laws of his being. In pursuance of this plan, he addresses his understanding in the Gospel; he appeals to his heart by all the motives and influences contained in the Gospel.

This is grounded upon a necessity growing out of the very laws of thought and feeling. I repeat, I assume it as true that God operates throughout the universe upon every thing he has made, in harmony with the nature he has given to it. If this may not be taken as self-evident, then there is nothing self-evident in the universe, and all human knowledge is simply a stupendous folly.

When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, restored the paralytic, or raised up the dead, it is as certain that there was a demand for the immediate energies of the omnipotent and all-creating Spirit as when the universe was made. Nothing less, according to the established laws of material things, could meet the exigencies of the occasion. But when a soul in ruins is to be restored, the work is not the same, neither is the way of God the same. God does not work alike upon matter and mind.

The power that he employs in moving the soul would be folly in the work of raising the dead; while the energy that brought a Lazarus from the grave would be as illy suited to stir the heart with a sense of guilt, or destroy in it the love of sin. Purlblind, indeed, must have been the venerated fathers of denominational orthodoxy, never to have caught a glimpse of this grand truth. Strange that Doctors of Divinity should stumble where it would seem that babes might walk without a fear.

The Gospel is the [201] power of God to save the soul. But in the Christ-idea--to borrow a happy expression from one whose work of faith and labor of love will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just*--lies the secret of its wondrous might. Jesus, the Christ, is not only the center and sum of all Gospel truth, but the center and sum of all converting and saving power. The tale of Calvary has stirred more hearts than any other tale that was ever told. The Hero of Redemption has elicited a higher admiration, a holier love, than any other hero that every lived.

The compassion of the dying Jesus for sinful men has awakened a loftier gratitude than ever throbbed in any heart at the mention of any human name. Blessed be God for the mighty, heaven-born energy concentrated in this single, grand idea of a suffering, dying Christ. The soul may realize it, but the tongue can never tell it. There is more power in this single conception, taken in its manifold relations, to elevate the race, to ennoble our humanity, to make men better, and truer, and purer, than in the speculations of all earthly philosophy, from Confucius to Cousin.

The Gospel of Jesus is itself the highest philosophy known on earth or in heaven. The angels in glory bend in astonishment and rapture over the stupendous display of God's wisdom in the redemption of sinners through the Gospel. In this whole arrangement the wisdom of the Infinite One shines out as grandly as the noonday sun from a cloudless sky. But the power of a fact is felt only by those who accept it as a fact. This history of all hearts offers no exception to this law. God influences mind according to the laws of mind.

Hence the Gospel is only the power of God to "the called," to "the saved," to "them that believe." By one of those [202] unchanging laws, therefore, which God will not violate, the influence by which repentance is induced is made to depend upon faith. Faith is the substratum upon which repentance reposes. You can no more have repentance or a change of heart without faith, than you can have a building without a foundation. You can not rear a gorgeous temple in mid-air. You can not have a superstructure without a substructure.

God saves man according to the laws of thought and feeling. He does not propose literally to create man over again in the process of renovation. He comes to him as he is. He takes hold of him with the Gospel, and saves him, if he saves him at all, without violence to a single law of his nature. From this fixed point, I reason with the fullest assurance of understanding. Upon this foundation I build without a fear. Sectarian theology unsettles every thing, turns every thing into chaos.

It has no logical foundation. It has no reason and no philosophy. God's Gospel is a golden chain of cause and effect. Every link in this chain has been wisely wrought. Nothing is without its reason, nothing without its end. Looking off from this stand-point over the long centuries that have passed away since this grand Christ-idea was first made known to the world, and contemplating what God has wrought by it, who can refrain from exclaiming with the apostle: "O, depth of the bounty, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! how unfathomable are his judgments, and how unsearchable are his paths! Yea, who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been his counselor? or who hath first given to God, that he should deserve a recompense? Unto him be glory forever. Amen."

But what more? When the sinner believes in Jesus, and is deeply penitent for his sins; when his understanding is enlightened and his heart is changed, what then? [203] Why, then, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." To the law and to the testimony; how readest thou? But why be baptized? Jesus commands; is not that enough? Nay, but is not the commandment wise? And may not its wisdom

be vindicated? I answer, yes. My faith is as firm, that there is a Divine reason lying beneath this Divine commandment, as that God is all-wise. Let us reverently attempt to look for it. It may, perhaps, lie deeper than our ken, but it can not be wrong to look.

First, then, I confess that if there were no universe beyond God and the single offending sinner, whose case may be supposed to be under consideration, I can see no reason why baptism should be enjoined. Such a reason might still exist, but, in such a case, would lie deeper than our vision. Were it commanded in such a case, the existence of the reason might be inferred with certainty from the Divine Wisdom, even though our profoundest search failed to discover any trace of it.

If, however, God and the single sinner were the whole universe, all that would be necessary to put the sinner within the reach of Divine clemency, seems to be gained, when the sinner believes and repents. His understanding is then right, and his heart is right. His status is known to himself, and fully known to God, and beside these there is supposed to be none else. Human reason, it seems to me, in such a case, falls to discover a necessity for any thing more. But this supposed case is widely different from the real case.

The sinner, in point of fact, is only one among millions equally guilty. And besides the guilty millions, there are millions of beings that have kept their first estate, and never sinned. In forgiving a sinner, God must take into account the moral influence of the act throughout all ranks of created beings under law to him. The point at [204] which he proposes to forgive the sinner, must be the one that all right-thinking subjects of the Divine government will recognize at once as the proper one.

The angels around the throne must be able to see and vindicate the wisdom and justice of the Almighty Ruler. But God only can read the heart. In all the universe, the penitent sinner's status, until developed in an overt act, is known only to himself and to God. But he has sinned openly. With a bold front he has measured arms with Omnipotence. His rebellion has not been confined to his heart. It has not exhausted itself in sympathy. Men on earth, the partners of his crime, have been the witnesses, and angels in heaven have looked on with astonishment at his defiant airs.

Now, what does the nature of the case seem to demand? Where does it appear to be proper that God should meet this once bold and defiant, but now humbled and stricken, outlaw? Where should God require him to stand, when he bestows upon him the boon of a merciful forgiveness of all his past sins? I answer: Out before heaven and earth, confessing his guilt, avowing his repentance, and pledging himself to unflinching fidelity in all time to come. His faith and repentance must be embodied in an overt act, that men and angels can see.

Surely this is clear beyond cavil. Sinner, in this issue between God and Satan, your rightful Lawgiver demands that you shall define your position. He requires you to choose whom you will serve, and to declare your choice before heaven and earth. Are you for your rightful Sovereign, or do you stand in the ranks of the enemy? God has established an institution, and made it the line of separation between his kingdom and that of the opposing power. This institution is Christian baptism.

In this overt act, you externalize your faith and repentance, and make them visible to [205] your fellow-men. In this act you formally and solemnly dedicate yourself to God. In it, you vow eternal allegiance to his throne. In it, all the holy desires and heaven-born resolves of the inner man, take upon them an outward form, and can be seen and read by your associates. Is it strange that God should demand such an expression of your faith in him? such a pledge of eternal fealty in time to come?

Nay, it would have been strange, indeed, if God had tendered forgiveness without it. It has its foundation in the eternal fitness of things. Its reason is clear as a sunbeam. It is not the value of the thing done. It is not that it has saving merit in it. It is not that water, as such, has power to cleanse from guilt. Baptism is no charm. It has in it no mystery. Its sole value is this: That as an open, public avowal of your faith and penitence, as a formal and solemn dedication of yourself to God in a heaven-appointed way, it places you in a proper position before heaven and earth to receive the free and gracious forgiveness of your past sins. Sinner, why do you hesitate? Humble, stricken, sin-sick believer, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Blessed be God for a reasonable religion! a religion that can be defended alike against the sneers of the bigot, and the scoffs of the infidel. To his name be the glory forever. Amen. [206]

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gw-longan/the-conditions-of-the-gospel-reasonable/>

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